

Rae & Co's kids' stuff

Yesterday was bring-your-kid-to-work day and here at Queen's Park politicians jumped in with both feet.

Premier Bob Rae brought with him not just his daughter, Lisa, but someone else's child, Abosede Taiwo, and they all posed nicely for the cameras at a pre-arranged photo-op before question period.

Not to be outdone, Liberal leader Lyn McLeod had her own student, Risha Binda, a 14-year-old Grade 9 youngster, tagging along.

As he left the House after question period, Rae invited his two young followers to join him for the media "scrum" that happens each afternoon as he leaves the Legislature.

"Come and see what a scrum is like," he invited. "You'll see how awful it is."

So, if you were a student taking in a day at worker's paradise central, what would you have learned yesterday?

Lesson No. 1: Given an extremely worthwhile educational program organized by the Learning Partnership, you can be assured that politicians will turn it into a shameless publicity stunt.

Lesson No. 2: No matter how tough legislation gets, there's always someone who wants it toughened. This was to be learned at a press conference at which a number of anti-smoking groups pushed for even tougher legislation.

Now I'm all in favor of legislation stopping the sale of tobacco to young people. I'm in favor of limiting where and when and with whom you may smoke. I even tend to agree with the philosophy that says pharmacies should be purveyors of healthy stuff and not an evil weed that makes you sick and causes 13,000 deaths in Ontario annually. By the same philosophy, however, you do wonder just when the government is going to stop pharmacies from selling sodium-laden potato chips that may lead to heart attacks and strokes and sugar-loaded candies that can be deadly for diabetics.

Lesson No. 3: Pay your political debts. We learned this lesson from the

premier, who despite believing scrums are "awful," nevertheless called one to announce his government would be paying catastrophic medicine bills for people who don't have insurance to cover drug bills.

Don't get me wrong. I believe there should be some mechanism that kicks in to help those who are chronically ill and who face financial hardship just paying bills for their medication.

But the timing and the reasons given for doing this are interesting. While media had no inkling before the scrum what the announcement would be, an activist from AIDS

Action Now was on hand with prepared press releases at the premier's scrum, so it was fairly clear which lobby group this measure was aimed to appease.

Secondly, we're told that since the economy is picking up, we can now afford to pay these costs. Well, hey, things may be starting to look a little rosier, but the province still has a \$60-billion-plus in accumulated debt. The government has had four years to do this and now, just in time for an election, the cabinet decides it's a good idea. Are the NDP now going to open the coffers on a wing and a prayer of economic recovery in order to ensure re-election?

Lesson No. 4: Do your math. And your homework. Finance Minister Floyd Laughren gave us all the good news about economic recovery in Ontario.

But, as McLeod pointed out, it's not quite a bowl of cherries yet. Ontario still has 100,000 fewer people working than in 1989.

Lesson No. 5: In Grade 9, if you bang on your desk and make catcalls and interrupt constantly while other people are speaking, you will probably get sent to the principal's office. In the Legislature, it's the way they do business.

And that, folks, is the toughest lesson of all.

■ Christina Blizzard's column appears Tuesday, Thursday and Friday.



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