

# On Sudbury byelection scandal, deputy premier responds, 'conversations happen'



[22.11.2016 Jessica Smith Cross](#)

The government has a new answer to the opposition's questions about the Sudbury byelection scandal — the “everybody's doing it,” defence.

In Question Period Tuesday, deputy premier **Deb Matthews** handled Sudbury scandal questions from the opposition — and there were many.

Crown prosecutor **Vern Brewer** had told journalists at the Sudbury courthouse Monday that his case includes the allegation that Energy Minister **Glenn Thibeault** “sought certain benefits,” in order to run for the Ontario Liberals. Thibeault isn't charged because seeking or accepting the benefits isn't a violation of the *Election Act*; but Liberal operative **Pat Sorbara** is charged for allegedly offering those benefits, which is against the law, the Crown lawyer explained.

Until Tuesday, Sudbury byelection questions were mostly fielded by Attorney General **Yasir Naqvi**, who'd been called upon to repeat that the case was before the courts, so it would be wrong to prejudice it by answering questions in the legislature.

Matthews' responses took a different tack. She came prepared with counter allegations about the opposition parties, tailored to suggest that they too may have offered politicians patronage jobs now and then as incentives to further their parties' political goals. As Matthews later put it: "There are conversations that do happen."

The deputy premier began with anti-sex-ed activist **Queenie Yu**, who ran as an independent in the Scarborough-Rouge River byelection this fall.

“The Leader of the Opposition’s chief of staff was recently caught holding secret negotiations with former Scarborough-Rouge River candidate Queenie Yu,” Matthews said. “The PC’s top aide sent an email to Queenie Yu, flip-flopping again on the sex-ed curriculum, the very same day as the deadline for withdrawing a candidate from the race. There are many ethical questions surrounding that ...”

“When asked if the party was trying to convince Yu to withdraw from the race, the PC leader declined to comment. Now I think it’s time he comments,” she said.

Matthews next responses turned PC MPP **Laurie Scott**, who resigned her seat in 2009, allowing then PC leader **John Tory** to run for it, and at that time accepted a job with the PC party.

Matthews quoted media coverage from the time that characterized it as an “exchange” and a “trade.”

The defense isn’t entirely new: Matthews had used similar lines about Scott last year when questioned about the other Sudbury byelection charge against Sorbara — allegedly offering a bribe to former Liberal candidate **Andrew Olivier**, to step aside for Thibeault.

This time, Matthews also spoke about former PC MPP **Garfield Dunlop**, who stepped down from his seat in Simcoe North to allow the new PC Leader **Patrick Brown** to run, and at that time took a job with the party, to work on education policy, Matthews said. “I wonder whether Mr. Dunlop did actually provide some education to the Leader of the Opposition on throwing stones in glass houses,” she quipped.

Finally, when asked about the Sudbury scandal by NDP deputy leader **Jagmeet Singh**, Matthews responded with questions about the circumstances under which he was promoted to become deputy leader, just as it was being widely reported that he was considering a run at the federal NDP leadership.

“I’m just curious whether that was just a coincidence or there was some reason that he ended up on the front bench as deputy leader and has, so far at least, not appeared to be running for the federal leadership,” she said.

After question period, Matthews said her but-everybody’s-doing-it approach to answering questions about alleged bribery wasn’t meant to suggest that her party has done it too. They’re vigorously defending the allegations, she said.

“I thought it was important and fair to raise some questions about (the opposition's) behaviour. They’ve been playing the high-and-mighty card and I thought, you’ve got some explaining to do on those particular cases, and there are a lot more,” she said.

However, Matthews said “conversations” about inducements for politicians to run, or not run, for office, or to step down, happen in politics.

“I’ve been involved on a number of issues and there are conversations that do happen. Anyone who says they don’t is being naive. So, those conversations do happen and, I’ve said in the House, all parties have conversations about candidates running, or not running,” Matthews said.

Asked if an example of those “conversations,” is **Eric Hoskins** and **Charles Sousa** getting cabinet posts after they crossed the convention floor to support **Kathleen Wynne**’s bid to become premier in 2013, Matthews replied, “Conversations happen, conversations happen.”

Brown said Dunlop's position working on education policy with the party wasn't given to him in exchange for stepping down. Dunlop had already been considering resigning when he approached Brown and offered to step down, according to Brown.

"These are ludicrous, ludicrous pathetic smears," he said. "They can't answer this, they can't say what happened is right so instead of answering legitimate questions that the public deserves to have answered, they resort to smears."

Singh also denied being offered the position as deputy leader in exchange for staying on as an NDP MPP.

"If something's a violation of the *Election Act*, it shouldn't be normal, in any way," he said. "We have laws in place, it should not be normal to contravene the laws."