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MEDIA RELEASE

McGuinty's Liberals Ignore Public Process

Thursday, May 04, 2006 – TORONTO – Today at Queen's Park the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs will be holding only 2 hours of public hearings on an omnibus bill, Bill 81, that proposes to increase the term of office of municipal elected officials to 4 years from 3 years.

"Increasing the term to 4 years is not justified. The people have not been asked what they think and only 2 hours of public hearings is outrageous – the bill was referred to this committee less than 48 hours ago. And the way the provincial government has hidden this major change in an omnibus Bill dealing mostly with budget measures is insulting. When the Harris-Conservatives used to do this, McGuinty condemned Mike Harris for this kind of chicanery," fumed City Councillor Michael Walker, St. Paul's.

This increase in the term for municipal officials was floated forward by the Premier in late February. Since then, there has been no debate in the Legislature on this issue. Today's public hearing is the first and only time the public will have a chance to speak to this issue.

Councillor Michael Walker tabled a motion at Toronto City Council asking for a plebiscite question on this issue to be added to this year's municipal election ballot. This motion was not accepted for discussion by City Council at its meeting last week.

"This seems to serve politicians not the people who they represent. Is the Premier trying to curry favour with rural politicians? Why is the Premier trying to ram this legislation through when this change would affect so many?" asked Councillor Walker.

"Keeping the 3 year term provides greater accountability to the voter by asking for a new mandate more regularly. Keeping the 3 year term helps level the playing field for challengers to incumbents. If the voter has a reason to vote against a councillor, they should not have to wait a year longer. Municipal politics is the closest to the people – the voter needs greater opportunity, not less, to make an elected official accountable for their actions. Four year terms will give bad public representatives more leash, more time to get entrenched," stated Councillor Walker.

In 1999, Premier McGuinty said: "This omnibus, megabill approach to legislation makes for bad legislation... We will not buy into that sort of approach by supporting this bill. We will not set a precedent that gives the government the green light to continue to ram omnibus bills down our throats..." "Why is the Premier now singing the same tune as Mike Harris? Has he forgotten the principles he was elected on?" asked Councillor Walker.

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