

MPP tells hearing OCDSB school board meetings ‘better than Netflix’

By MANOTICK MESSENGER STAFF

Sometimes there is yelling and screaming.

Sometimes the trustees accuse each other of being racist.

Sometimes a trustee will shut down a parent’s presentation and call him transphobic.

And three times last year, the board had to call in the Ottawa Police to restore order at their public meetings. This, of course, happened after the same board banned the same officers from being at schools while in uniform.

Many parents and other members of the community have discovered the live streaming of the board’s meetings through a link on their website. One of the regular viewers is Carleton MPP Goldie Ghamari, who watches the meetings to monitor what is going on with the school board in her riding and throughout Ottawa.

“I tune in to the OCDSB trustee meetings because it’s better than watching a

Netflix reality TV show,” Ghamari said during the Provincial Government’s Pre-Budget Consultation Meeting Held in Ottawa in late January. “It really is. There’s always some sort of drama, there are always some sort of allegations, there are always some sort of accusations.”

The Ottawa Carleton District School Board has been in the news a number of times in the last year. However, rather than being about education or building new schools, the news has been about disruptions and in-fighting at their board meetings, suspensions, lawsuits, and the thousands of families who have had no school bus transportation for their children to get to school. The majority of those students have been in Ghamari’s Carleton riding.

“In speaking with my constituents and people from all across Ottawa, the one message I get is that they have lost confidence in the school board trustees,” Ghamari told the hearing in response



Carleton MPP Goldie Ghamari was highly critical of the OCDSB during the Provincial Government’s Pre-Budget Consultation Meeting Held in Ottawa in late January.

to a presentation made by OCDSB Trustee and Chari Lynn Scott. “That’s why it’s so important for people to pay more atten-

tion to municipal elections. People think ‘it doesn’t impact me’, but for those of you who have children in the public edu-

cation system, your school board trustee is one of the most important politicians in your day-to-day lives. They’re the ones who dir-

ectly impact the quality of your children’s education.”

MEETINGS
continues on page 15



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MEETINGS continues from page 14

Ghamari was critical of the lack of communication from the OCDSB. Included in that lack of communication is that Zone 10 Trustee, Justine Bell, has been living in Mexico for more than half a year, including several months when she was vice-chair.

Before Ghamari's questioning of Scott on the issue, the board had never publicly acknowledged that Bell is representing her ward from Mexico. Bell makes no mention of being in Mexico on her website.

"I can only sit back and

imagine if the OCDSB had been more concerned with getting proper updates from Vicky Kyriaco and OSTA, for example, during the summer months, on the plan for how they were going to provide bus routes for students, maybe there wouldn't have been a fiasco," Ghamari said.

Ghamari, like many parents in the western and rural areas of the Carleton riding, did not know that OSTA had failed to obtain a contract with a school bus transportation company for the area until just days before the start of

school.

"The only way I heard about the school bus cancellations was on the radio prior to the long weekend before the first day of school," she told Scott at the hearing. "As a provincial MPP that's how I found out about the thousands of (students affected by) school bus cancellations which heavily impacted my riding. No one bothered to reach out to me. Not you, anyone. For me to get the news about the school board trustees from the radio is a little bit shocking,

it shows the disconnect. Even though I've constantly tried reaching out, it's very frustrating."

Ghamari ended that part of the hearing by telling Scott that she still wants to work with the board, but added that the board needs to focus on its

priorities.

"I would say the take away here is I am willing to work with you and I'm willing to work with the school board trustees, but what I would like to see is some seriousness, some dedication, maybe not have school trustees in

Mexico for half the year or longer, maybe focus on building schools, maybe have a plan to get those schools built, and maybe focus on re-opening Munster Elementary School and providing a little more quality education to rural schools," she said.



OCDSB Chair and local school board trustee Lynn Scott was on the hot seat as she was grilled over the board's behaviour and antics during the Provincial Government's Pre-Budget Consultation Meeting Held in Ottawa in late January.

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