

**Subject:** OPSEU's Thomas calls for public cannabis option



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### **OPSEU's Thomas calls for public cannabis option**

TORONTO - OPSEU President Warren (Smokey) Thomas appeared on a Financial Post panel discussion and called for publicly run cannabis outlets in municipalities that don't want sales in private hands. He said the government is putting many municipalities on the spot by giving them just one chance to opt out of allowing private, for-profit stores to sell cannabis.

"As the smoke clears on Doug Ford's flip-flop on cannabis sales," Thomas said, "we see a number of municipalities standing up and saying, 'We don't want the social, regulatory and policing costs of private stores dumped on us. But we don't want organized crime coming in to fill the void, either.'"

"Of course, there'd be no problem if cannabis sales were kept in the experienced, responsible hands of LCBO staff. That's what health experts, law enforcement agencies and many others, including municipal leaders, told the previous Liberal government was best during its extensive consultations.

"But it doesn't have to be either/or," Thomas continued. "We propose allowing Ontario Cannabis Stores to set up shop in municipalities that don't want private stores. That doesn't necessarily mean more bricks and mortar. The existing LCBO network can be retrofitted to allow for cannabis sales."

The President was questioned about the motives behind OPSEU's support for publicly run cannabis distribution, suggesting the union was only looking out for its own interests.

"We represent over 155,000 workers," Thomas replied. "A few hundred workers won't make or break OPSEU. But as a social justice union, we call for public policy that is in the best interests of all Ontarians. And putting cannabis sales in private, for-profit hands is bad policy, pure and simple.

"As far as I can see, the only people who will benefit are the owners of the private stores - mostly former political staffers who stand to make eye-popping profits. That's money that could have gone into health, education and infrastructure instead of profiteers' deep pockets.

"And if you want to talk about motives, let's look at medical cannabis growers. They talked a good game about how they were filling a vital medical niche. We agreed. But now some are indicating a shift to recreational cannabis. Why? Better profits. I ask again, how can we trust private cannabis retailers to be responsible when their one and only goal is profit? And what happens to patients in need when there's not enough medical cannabis?"

Thomas also dismissed the option of online sales. "We've seen it in other jurisdictions: people don't want a record of buying cannabis. They want to pay cash. If there's a credit card record, there's a way to hack into it. That could mean not crossing the border or not getting hired. Do consumers really trust that information with private retailers either? Honestly, the more I look at the Premier's cannabis policy, the more I think he belongs on the Bong Show."

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