

# No more hockey in Ottawa?

## McGuinty's proposed tax exemption scrap could spell the end of the Sens



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Premier McGuinty has done it again. This time though, he has gone too far because now his decisions are affecting something near and dear to many Ottawans – the Senators.

McGuinty proposed the idea of scrapping a tax exemption which allows businesses to write off up to 50 per cent of tickets and private suites at Sens games. The exemption also applies to theatre performances and concerts as well entertainment costs at nightclubs, social clubs and sports clubs.

Scrapping this tax exemption would pretty much spell the end of Senators hockey in the capital. Team president Cyril Leeder said the Sens need this exemption in order to survive.

Although there is a strong passion for hockey in the city, the Sens market isn't as big

as others, which is why they rely on businesses. Leeder said about half of the Sens' season ticket holders are business, and they take up about 11,000 of the 19,000 seats in Scotiabank Place. Having this exemption entices businesses into buying tickets because they know they won't have to pay full price when it comes time to pay taxes.

According to Leeder, if businesses did have to pay full price then many of them would opt not to buy tickets because the price would be too high.

Hulse, Playfair and McGarry – a funeral company – said this would be the case with their business because the smaller businesses – like theirs – wouldn't be able to afford full-price tickets.

Another issue is the fact that these businesses lease 120 of the 150 suites at Scotiabank Place and Leeder said, along with season tickets packages, there is no one on hold to buy these tickets or suites should they become available. Torontonians, on the other hand, may applaud this change because of the effect – or lack there of – on their teams.

Right now, many of the "suits" buy up tick-

ets for Leafs games leaving many Torontonians without tickets for themselves. If this exemption was to take effect, assuming the businesses don't want to buy full-price tickets, that means more tickets for the rest of the Leafs fans who couldn't get any before. Essentially, the team wouldn't feel the pinch.

In addition to the Leafs, Toronto also supports the Raptors, Blue Jays and Toronto FC

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with no struggle. It's no wonder Toronto can effortlessly support this number of teams, though when the GTA is home to over six million people, this in comparison to Ottawa's roughly one million.

Not having the Sens will not only upset hockey fans in the city, but it will affect businesses in the Kanata area.

As it stands right now, restaurants along Terry Fox Road in Kanata benefit greatly from game nights, as do restaurants in Kanata Centrum. Along with the money being brought in from these restaurants, there are countless other fast-food spots in the area such as Wendy's,

Harvey's, Subway and McDonald's which get a lot of business.

The Sens are also a tourist attraction so if they were to leave that obviously means less money coming into the city, because of less fans from other cities coming among other reasons. The good news for Sens fans is the provincial government doesn't have final say in the matter. They must talk with Harper's federal government before anything is finalized, which may or may not prove to be beneficial for Sens fans.

Bob Chiarelli said there are a number of elements which factor in to the Senators' sustainability.

One of these factors, he said, is the rise of the loonie which is a "huge bonus" for teams since they pay their players in U.S. dollars.

"It's not a done deal, it's a list of possible considerations on which the federal and provincial governments would have to work together," Chiarelli said.

There is a positive to come from this, however, as Ontario Finance Minister Dwight Duncan said he will respond to Leeder's advice in the upcoming spring budget.

Want to know how to get many citizens of Ottawa on your side McGuinty? Keep the Sens.