



TOP STORIES

Toronto Raptors show no mercy in win against rival Boston Celtics



Ontario government says Premier's custom van will save taxpayers money

COLIN FREEZE > AND LAURA STONE >
PUBLISHED 15 HOURS AGO



The proposal to overhaul a van's interior for the Premier was put together by A1 Mobility, a Mississauga-based van-retrofit company that the Premier visited last fall.

FACEBOOK / ANGELODURSO

The Ontario government is defending a proposal by Premier Doug Ford's office to spend \$50,000 overhauling a van's interior by saying the modifications would be a "frugal" use of funds.

"The Premier is actually saving the taxpayers of Ontario a lot of money by even making the request," Economic Development Minister Todd Smith told reporters on Tuesday, arguing that the retrofitting could potentially lower Mr. Ford's airfare costs. "He's not a premier that likes to travel by plane across the province."

Mr. Smith called the proposal frugal but was vague about how far it has gone and whether any public money would be spent on it. "At the end of the day, nothing has happened on this file yet," he said.

The \$50,000 plan, which does not include the cost of a van, was revealed in court filings this week because Ontario Provincial Police Deputy Commissioner Brad Blair is challenging the government's decision to give the OPP's top job to Toronto police Superintendent Ron Taverner, a friend of Mr. Ford's. The OPP provide security and transportation to the Premier.

Newly disclosed records reveal the Premier's office circulated a plan to the OPP last fall that envisioned ripping out a van's interior to make room for amenities such as WiFi, a mini-fridge, leather seats, a 32-inch TV with a Blu-ray player and a "power reclining sofa bench."

Opposition politicians are now seizing on these details to suggest the Progressive Conservatives care more about their leader's luxury than social causes.

The proposal was put together by A1 Mobility, a Mississauga-based van-retrofit company that the Premier visited last fall. "Doug Ford thank you for visiting our facility and giving us this amazing opportunity," one of its owners, Angelo Durso, posted on his Facebook page during that visit.

The Nov. 5 post shows the Premier at the company. Two weeks later, on Nov. 21, a staffer in the Premier's office received A1's cost estimate for the van retrofit. Using his personal e-mail address, he proceeded to pass it along to the OPP.

On Tuesday, government officials said they talked about acquiring a used police van. The Premier's office "was told by the OPP that they had vans in their fleet which could be used," said Simon Jefferies, a spokesman for Mr. Ford.

But he added that “at this point in time, there are no expenses for anyone to have to cover” and “if a van was ever required to be modified, it would go through the OPP’s procurement process.”

Copies of OPP e-mails were filed in court this month as part of Deputy Commissioner Blair’s legal fight.

Passed over for the top job, the police commander argues the government has improperly interfered in police work. He alleges the \$50,000 retrofit proposal was an “off-the-books” request that violated police procurement policies.

On Tuesday, Mr. Smith denied that anything was kept off the books.

© Copyright 2019 The Globe and Mail Inc. All rights reserved.

351 King Street East, Suite 1600, Toronto, ON Canada, M5A 0N1

Phillip Crawley, Publisher