

Won't ask for back-to-work legislation, Miller states

Progress made on non-monetary issues, mayor says

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Mayor David Miller has dealt a blow to the possibility of a legislated end to Toronto's 13-day-old municipal workers' strike, leaving only two options for a city stuck without garbage collection, pools or city-run childcare: a quick, negotiated settlement or a long, smelly summer.

"We're not going to ask for back-to-work legislation," the mayor told reporters Friday, the most explicit he's been to date on the subject.

"This strike should be settled, it can be settled, and it will be settled if people recognize the city's financial situation and agree to an affordable contract."

Mr. Miller said the best collective agreements are negotiated and he cited the uncertainty of arbitration, which led last year to a "very generous" settlement that raises Toronto police salaries by roughly 10 per cent over three years.

Premier Dalton McGuinty has ruled out a legislated end to the Toronto walkout as long as both sides are talking. Opposition Leader Tim Hudak said earlier this week it's too early for back-to-work legislation, which would involve recalling the legislature from its summer recess.

Mr. Miller said the city and the union locals representing 24,000 indoor and outdoor workers made "considerable" progress this week on non-monetary issues. But he also chastised union leaders for calling a strike that has "severely hurt" children without alternatives to city-run pools, recreation programs or daycare.

"I want to say to the unions and to the people they represent, enough is enough," Mr. Miller said.

Mark Ferguson, president of Canadian Union of Public Employees local 416, which represents the city's 6,200 outdoor workers, said the mayor's remarks "did not sit terribly well with us."

Mr. Ferguson agreed some progress was made on less substantive issues, but he said the big stumbling blocks remain: job security, seniority rights and layoff provisions, contracting work in or out, advanced life-support training for paramedics, the inclusion of Family Day in the contract, wage increases, and the controversial sick-leave benefit, to name a few.

"We agree 'enough is enough' and we were saying as much back in March," he said. "It's unfortunate that it's taken this amount of time for the city to get serious and start to bargain."

The piles of garbage continue to rise along with tempers at some of the city's 19 temporary dumps. Two new drop-off locations were opened Friday, at Centennial Arena Community Centre on Ellesmere Road and Sunnybrook Park on Leslie Street.

The city closed the York Mills site last night because it had reached capacity, and will do the same Sunday for the Christie Pits dump – a flashpoint for protesters, who have blocked efforts at pest control.

Toronto's medical officer of health, David McKeown, said the Christie Pits dump has become infested with insects. He issued an order Friday under the Health Protection and Promotion Act that compels the city to spray the site with insecticide.

Dr. McKeown said the temporary dumps, which won't be cleared until the strike ends, pose no threat to human health as long as they're managed properly. He urged residents to co-operate with the city.

The temporary dumps are, on average, about 30 to 40 per cent full, said Geoff Rathbone, general manager of solid waste.

