This page was exported from - The Auroran
Export date: Thu Mar 28 15:50:56 2024 / +0000 GMT

BROCK'S BANTER: A Conservative Conundrum

By Brock Weir

I'm not a superstitious person by nature.
It's always seemed ridiculous to me that high-rises more often than not obscure their heights by one floor by ignoring the fact they actually have a thirteenth storey. A fear of black cats has never failed to raise an eyebrow or two. Putting up a new calendar before the turn of the year, or deploying an umbrella inside just before you go out into a deluge has rarely made me feel like I'm tempting the fickle finger of fate.
And ladders? Well, if going under a ladder is the quickest and most pain-free route between Point A and Point B, you can be sure that I'm going to forge ahead.
And yet, now and then, something happens that makes me pause before writing down anything to go in this space. Sometimes what I've put in this column is apparently too tempting for fate to resist ? with varying degrees of severity.
For example, back in 2012 when The Queen marked her Diamond Jubilee, I wrote that Her Majesty had never felt the need to renew the commitment she made on her twenty-first birthday to the Commonwealth such was the dedication to which she has carried out her pledge since that time. The very next day after we went to press, she did just that!
The following year, I wrote about my one-man campaign to get Alberta-born actor and Second World War veteran Conrad Bain a star on Canada's Walk of Fame. He died the next week.
By the time 2015 rolled around, I referenced the country song, ?I Never Promised You A Rose Garden? and Lynn Anderson, the singer who made the song famous, died the day after publication.
Fast forward to the fresh days of 2019.
Just a few weeks ago, in a column entitled ?Think of the Children! If It's Convenient.? I lamented the disconnect lawmakers in upper levels of government have towards youth and youth-related issues.
?From the outset, and rightly so, there were calls for spending to be reined in and some programs be reviewed ostensibly to protect the province from going further into the red,? I wrote at the time, reflecting on some of the announcements the Ontario Government has made to drive down spending and debt left over by the previous government. ?Of course, when government brass touted this obvious necessity, it was couched in the time-tested phrase that such measures were integral in stopping ?our children and grandchildren' and future generations down the line from being saddled with the debt of today. On its face, it is something that is hard to argue?.but this sentiment doesn't quite hold water when pumping the brakes on a program or initiative to combat a spending spiral results in ?our children and grandchildren' and indeed their futures being the first demo caught in the crosshairs.?
The education system, for instance, usually holds the first programs to go ? that is, of course, when the programs and services are not directly related to core subjects like math and English. Arts funding goes out the window first despite how important these subjects are to the development of the child and in engaging and stimulating their minds so they can play effective roles in today's global society.
No sooner had the ink dried on the page, however, the Government announced a headline-grabbing 10 per cent reduction of post-secondary tuition for every student in the province.
On the face of it, it sounded like a move that would be extremely helpful for all students, particularly those from struggling families, and a move that has been pushed for decades. Below the face, however, there was something that was, depending on your point of view, slightly incongruous to the stated intent of the announcement.
While the price of tuition was indeed being slashed by 10 per cent, this new initiative would remove from the books a program put in place by the previous government that translated into free tuition in the form of Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP) grants rather than loans.
?As part of its overall reform of post-secondary education affordability [Marrilee Fullerton, Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities] also announced that the government would be refocusing OSAP to ensure it remains sustainable and viable for future students while directing a greater proportion of OSAP funding to families with the greatest financial need,? said the Government in a statement.
The Minister added, ?The previous government believed in handing out OSAP money to some of Ontario's highest income earners with virtually no meaningful criteria for success. It is no surprise that student enrolment has remained flat while tuition rates have skyrocketed. Instead of using OSAP to indirectly subsidize future rounds of tuition hikes, we will focus our resources on families in greatest need while challenging our partners in the postsecondary sector to deliver better value for the high tuitions they already

charge.?

While it is of the utmost importance to ensure that OSAP remains sustainable and viable for future students, and it is also highly important to direct a greater portion of OSAP to families in need, the Province's announcement, in my opinion, misses the mark by a rather wide margin.

Students coming from families who wouldn't otherwise be able to afford tuition and are subject to an OSAP rollback will still leave university and college saddled with huge student debt as 10 per cent, although helpful, is something of a drop in the bucket.

Students for whom a university education was just a dream when they started high school five or six years ago, are now well on the path towards their degrees.

Secondary school students preparing to graduate this spring will not be as lucky and if they doggedly pursue their post-secondary education without the means of some of their counterparts, they will leave degrees in hand, but also shouldering tens of thousands of dollars in debt that could take decades to pay off.

Parents who have seen their kids able to pursue their dreams are already speaking up on the negative impacts this change will have on their families, but only time will tell whether these voices will be heard by those who can make a difference.

As we saw last week, the Ontario Government, which bills itself as the ?Government of the People?, lived up to its self-anointed name by heeding the concerns raised by municipalities, environmental groups and citizens at large over Bill 66, so perhaps there is a reason for optimism.

Then again, the thousands of parents across the Province who responded to the Government's public consultation on sex-ed reforms calling for a meaningful, relevant curriculum are still cooling their heels.