

VIEW FROM QUEEN'S PARK: Building Ontario Up

By Chris Ballard, MPP
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Premier Kathleen Wynne's plan to bring the legislature back within 20 days of the June 12 election has been realized. MPPs were sworn in on July 2 and quickly got to work.

I was touched to have my family at the swearing in ceremony. Audrey was there, along with Emily and Michelle, who flew into Toronto from their new homes, and Josh skipped a day of school to be at this historic event.

And historic it was ? this is the first time in Ontario's history that a woman was elected Premier of our province.

Selecting a Speaker of the House is an interesting experience. Subdued lobbying began a week before with letters and phone calls from some candidates. At the end, five MPPs put their names forward and, after the votes were counted, Dave Levac, MPP for Brant, was elected.

The Speaker is the servant of the House, rather than the servant of the Crown, the Government or any particular political party. Historically, the role of Speaker included giving the King the bad news if Parliament disagreed with the King's wishes. More than one Speaker was dispatched by an angry monarch. Today, a nod to that historical tidbit occurs as the Speaker is ?dragged? reluctantly, to his seat.

The following day brought the Speech from the Throne. After seven years as Lieutenant Governor, this was the last one for The Honourable David C. Onley. The Lieutenant Governor will be followed by Lieutenant Governor-designate Ms. Elizabeth Dowdeswell.

Another bit of trivia I learned this week ? His Honour has visited more than 85 per cent of Ontario's 107 ridings during his tenure. Back to the Speech from the Throne.

When the people of Ontario elected a majority Liberal government on June 12, they asked us to build Ontario up. They asked us to implement a practical plan to build more opportunity and more security for everyone, everywhere in Ontario without delay.

The Speech from the Throne outlined our government's plan to build Ontario up by:

? Building the talent and skills of our people through education and training.

? Building better public transit in cities and better roads to connect towns with rural and remote communities that feed our prosperity.

? Building a competitive business climate through partnerships with the private sector and increased trade missions that guarantee good job opportunities for today's workforce and lead to the next generation of jobs for tomorrow's workforce.

? Building retirement security with a made-in-Ontario pension plan that puts a comfortable, secure retirement on the horizon of every worker.

The Premier has promised to enact our plan ?with an unwavering commitment? to eliminate the deficit by 2017-18 in a way that is both fair and responsible.

My belief has always been that government can be a force for good in people's lives, and it should be active where it is appropriate. This sentiment is echoed in the speech, ?The things that people can't do themselves are where government has to be active and take a critical role.?

I know that your trust is hard-earned, but easily lost. And so we will work each and every day to keep your trust by meeting our commitments to you.

Just newly elected, it was a pleasant surprise to be appointed by the Premier as Parliamentary Assistant to David Orazietti, Minister of Government and Consumer Services. That role takes me back to my early days as Executive Director of the Consumers' Association of Canada (Ontario), and founding Board member of the Consumers Council of Canada.

I will work closely with the Minister on everything from undertaking special projects to standing in at events when the Minister is called away.

On the consumer side, the Ministry is here to educate, protect and serve Ontario consumers by ensuring a fair, safe and informed marketplace. We are dedicated to providing modern information services, as well as regulatory practices that serve the interests of Ontarians while contributing to a competitive economy.

On the government services side, the Ministry:

- ? offers driver's licenses, vehicle registrations and basic Ontario Health Card services through ServiceOntario centres
- ? provides human resource services and support to staff across the Ontario Public Service
- ? helps the government be transparent and accountable with quarterly expense reports for senior Ontario Public Service (OPS) staff and members of the provincial parliament (MPPs)
- ? provides innovative information and information technology services across the government,
- ? oversees the OPS's highly skilled workforce through HROntario, and
- ? provides ministries with a variety of cost-effective business services through Ontario Shared Services, including financial management and support, printing and translation, mail and courier, office supplies, insurance and employee pay and benefits services.

Finally, it was my pleasure to stand in the Legislature for the first time Monday and deliver a Member's Statement. Mine was about improved GO Train service to Newmarket and Aurora ? two new northbound trains leaving each weekday at 3.40 p.m. and 6.45 p.m. Improved GO Transit service was a cornerstone of my election platform.

I look forward to bringing many more good news stories to the Legislature, and to being a strong voice for our community.