

BROCK'S BANTER: Went with the wind

By Brock Weir

Spring is finally here, and to the season I would like to extend the warmest welcome.

Now, for those of you who happened to be outdoors on Friday afternoon untethered and otherwise ungrounded, I'd like to welcome you back from your impromptu, unplanned sailing trip to the Land of Oz.

This might not be Kansas, but if you were stuck out there with your twenty-first century equivalent to Toto, it might as well have been.

Friday seemed like such a pleasant day.

While still unseasonably cool, the sun was shining, the weekend promised what was supposed to be the first warm and temperate day of Spring, and it seemed, to borrow a late-minted political phrase, sunny ways ahead.

Then, the skies opened up.

Suddenly, sitting at my window-facing desk, I was looking out at a solid sheet of water coming down from the heavens. Then, as quickly as the deluge appeared, it stopped long enough to allow trees to bend over, their tops nearly kissing the ground, as horrendous winds came through to dry up with downpour.

But the wind didn't stop. It just kept coming. Shingles started to rapidly fly by my window. Otherwise sturdy-looking telephone polls began swaying back and forth, some snapping near the business end of things. Fences too were rocking back and forth, bits falling away with each gust, and some coming off panel by panel.

After re-gelling my already errant hair before venturing back out into the storm in a futile effort to avoid looking like Marty Allen by the time I reached my destination, I hit the road and, on the way, saw a full-sized love seat and mattress ready to be picked up outside an apartment building on the east side of the road take the air, rapidly rolling across the street and going headlong into the ground floor window of a retirement residence on the west.

An action-packed afternoon to be sure.

It almost seemed symbolic. As the next day brought that glorious spring sunshine we had all been craving, the winds of Friday appeared to sweep away the last vestige of a winter that refused to quit.

Change was indeed in the air, it seems to be all around us.

I am writing this just a few hours before the three main contenders to be Ontario's next Premier square off against each other in the very first time in the lead up to the June 7 Provincial election.

Although the writ only officially dropped this week, it feels like we've been caught in the crosshairs of this battle for far longer than humane.

Leaders have come and gone under circumstances all too familiar to us by now, candidates have fallen by the wayside, platforms have been built, dismantled and scattered with a speed as swift as Friday's winds, but these winds, as polls early in the week have indicated, have done nothing to quench the thirst for change, for better or worse.

As a guy who sets finger to keyboard for a living, I can't help but be fascinated by the power of the word in each of these political maelstroms.

Take, for instance, the brouhaha that erupted last week when Progressive Conservative leader Doug Ford was captured on video ? a video gleefully released by the Liberals ? speaking to a closed room of developers and real estate figures, promising them he would open up portions of Ontario's Green Belt for further development.

Granted, he did say that for every portion of the Green Belt opened up for development, an equal portion of land would be protected elsewhere ? willfully defeating the whole ?belt? concept.

?Ford's promise to pave the Greenbelt not only encourages urban sprawl, but it puts farmland, wildland and wetlands, including ravines and rivers currently protected, at risk of being encroached and even replaced by new suburban development,? said Minister of the Environment Chris Ballard in a statement, coinciding with his release of the video. ?The fact Doug Ford dismisses the Green Belt as ?just farmers' fields' that should be paved demonstrates his ignorance and disdain towards our natural environment and the important role it plays in protecting our environment and building better communities.?

It was a rare thing these days: a win for the Liberals that actually struck a chord with many voters, leading to swift and immediate condemnation from many corners, including some who traditionally bleed blue.

Such was the backlash that Mr. Ford quickly changed his tune.

Except, in this case, ?backlash? was, instead, called a ?consultation.?

This afternoon, Doug Ford announced that after consultation with the people of Ontario, an Ontario PC Government would maintain the Greenbelt in its entirety, read the Party statement, followed by the Ford statement below.

I looked at it as making sure we have more affordable housing, he said. There have been a lot of voices saying that they don't want to touch the Greenbelt. I govern through the people, I don't govern through government. The people have spoken we won't touch the Greenbelt. Very simple. That's it. The people have spoken. I'm going to listen to them, they don't want me to touch the Greenbelt, we won't touch the Greenbelt. Simple as that.

Then, on Saturday, the Party announced the ouster of social conservative candidate Tanya Granic Allen.

Granic Allen, a former leadership rival in the race to replace Patrick Brown, garnered significant support for her widely known social conservative activism including firm positions against abortion and against the rights of the LGBTQ community.

The reason for her ouster? Someone, as the kids say today, kept the receipts of her well-known views.

Tanya Granic Allen will no longer be a candidate for the Ontario PC Party, said Ford. We are a party comprised of people with diverse views that if expressed responsibly we would respect. However, the fact is her characterization of certain issues and people has been irresponsible. Our party remains focused on defeating Kathleen Wynne and bringing relief to families across Ontario.

This renewed focus might be, in and of itself, another sign of the winds of change, but with less than a month to go before the polls, it is still hard to say which way it is blowing and there will be a few more gusts before another storm next month.