

FRANKLY SPEAKING: Memorable Day

Last Sitting Day of the 40th Parliament was Most Memorable

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Thursday, May 1st turned out to be one of the most memorable of my 19 years as a Member of Provincial Parliament. When the bells rang to summon MPPs to the opening of the sessional day, little did we know that this would be the last day on which MPPs would conduct the business of the legislature of the 40th Parliament. What I did know, was that this would be a memorable day for me because it was the inaugural First Responders Day.

The Inaugural First Responders Day

My Private Member's Bill, An Act to Proclaim First Responders Day was passed unanimously on December 10th last year with the result that every May 1st would be celebrated as First Responders day in the province.

First Responders from across the province had confirmed that they would be in the galleries at Queen's Park to witness the tributes that would be delivered by all three parties in their honour. As the author of the bill, I had the privilege to deliver that tribute on behalf of the PC Caucus.

As it happens, my last recorded words in the Official Hansard Record was that tribute to First Responders. I can think of nothing more gratifying.

The Ontario Budget

We had known for some time that this would not be a routine day. The Finance Minister had announced that he would be tabling the government's budget on May 1st. All other routine business for the afternoon would be set aside.

Little had been left to the imagination about what would be in that budget, thanks to the series of announcements by the government in previous weeks. There were only two questions in the minds of MPPs on that day:

Would Andrea Horwath and her NDP Caucus once again keep the Liberal Government in office by supporting the budget, and when would that decision be made?

I had shared my thoughts on both questions with my Caucus colleagues. I had observed a noticeable change in the NDP Leader's demeanour during Question Period.

I predicted that Andrea Horwath could not in good conscience continue to support a government that she had come to so publicly and passionately condemn for its lack of integrity. By doing so, she would lose credibility with the public and within her own party. As for the timing, I wasn't as certain. Given the NDP Leader's previous insistence that she wanted to consult the public before making her decision, it would not be unreasonable to allow the legislative process to take its course and bring it to a conclusion with a confidence vote. That would have kept the legislature in session for one or two more weeks.

Another possible outcome was that the Premier would pre-empt the predictable Question Period assault and dissolve parliament immediately after tabling the budget.

The result would be that the budget would serve as the Liberals' campaign platform and we would be into an election campaign. The business of the legislature would be stopped in its tracks. That concerned me.

Implications to the Summary Report on the Ornge Air Ambulance Scandal

Why? Because as the PC lead on the committee investigating the Ornge Air Ambulance scandal, I along with the other members of the committee signed off on a Summary Report that was more than two years in the making. It identifies 95 specific concerns that relate to the lack of oversight and mismanagement on the part of senior Ministry of Health officials and the failure on the part of members on the Ornge Board of Directors to exercise their fiduciary responsibilities.

The report also makes specific recommendations to pursue recovery of public funds from Ornge executives and Board members and to implement key changes to the service delivery model of Ornge and put in place proper oversight mechanisms in the Ministry of Health.

The report was scheduled to be tabled on Monday, May 5th and given the possibility that the Premier would dissolve the legislature before that date, I was concerned that the work of the committee would never see the light of day.

I signalled that concern to the Premier during Question Period on the morning of May 1. I will leave it to you to conclude why she refused to ensure that the report would be made public, regardless of the timing of the election.

By 2:30 p.m. the next day, the Premier dissolved the 40th Parliament. The report will not be tabled.

I have a copy of the Ornge Summary Report. I think the public deserve to know.

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