



Spring 2019



The *InFormer*



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Welcome, former parliamentarians! It's springtime. Below is a list of what you'll find in the latest issue of *The InFormer*.

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Photo by Victoria Esterhammer.



The Artists Who Created The Art At Queen's Park

A special evening devoted to the artists
Thursday, March 7, 2019

It was indeed a special evening, as the book was launched and presented to Speaker Ted Arnott as a gift from the Ontario Association of Former Parliamentarians, to augment the Assembly's public art tours. The event turned out to also be the launch of another initiative by O.A.F.P.; Broadcast/Recording videoing the evening, to be edited later and put up on our new YouTube account.

Six of the artists featured in the book were present; Istvan Nyikos, Greg Furmanczyk, Linda Kooluris Dobbs, Phil Richards, Ron Kingswood, Phil Cote and each of them were invited to speak about the occasion. Bernard Poulin had to cancel but sent his daughter, Valerie Picher to deliver his remarks. Valerie appreciated being back where she had worked for a few years as a Chief of Staff to a couple of Cabinet Ministers.

The Vision of Artists

(Excerpts from selected speeches)

“I say thank you all for being here to acknowledge the content of a book celebrating the best that we in the arts try to be in the sharing of our wares with the population of our country. It is a rare occasion/when painters, & sculptors themselves are celebrated. Generally, it is our work which is more well known than our names. In that light, it behooves us to recognize the rebels among us who dare be bold enough to do when others don't.”

- Bernard Poulin

“I fondly remember, as a young student at the Ontario College of Art, often coming into this building to see the portrait paintings as well as other works of art and displays on the first floor, and then dashing up the grand staircase to the other floors to see all the other works of art.

As the world moves rapidly towards advanced digital technology, where art pieces are produced and reproduced by machinery, we are fortunate that there still are institutions, like the ones in this building, that not only collect but also commission new works of art that are still made by paint and brush or sculpted by hand: Every Premier has an official portrait painted, as well as the Speaker, and the Lieutenant Governor.

And so, many thanks, to the Ontario Legislative Assembly, the Office of the Speaker, and the Lieutenant Governor for that. By maintaining this tradition of commissioning new works of art made by artists, you continue to foster a mode of art which preserves the ‘hands on’ human connection, and so help to shape the cultural vitality of Toronto and the Province of Ontario. The visual arts, as well as all the other forms of art, together are so very important, and are vital in enriching people’s lives.”

- *Gregory Furmanczyk*

“Portraiture at this level is truly a collaborative endeavor between the subject and the artist. It is an honour to be chosen for such a commissioned work. Speaking for myself, I prefer to be the invisible creative force in the equation. If all the stars are aligned right, I am able to pull the soul out of my subjects and to place them in a wardrobe of the times, in a meaningful setting and surrounded by meaningful objects on the canvas that will tell their story.

In future generations, if someone comes upon this portrait knowing nothing of the subject, but comes away feeling insight into his or her character, then I have done my job. A Florentine artist Leon Battista Alberti in 1435, nearly a century before the Sistine Chapel was completed wrote “The painting will move the soul of the beholder when the people painted there each clearly shows the movement of his own soul. We weep with the weeping, laugh with the laughing, and grieve with the grieving.”

It has been found that with neuro-imagining research, our own motor systems are activated when we perceive brushstrokes. This mirror neuron system is involved with social communication, empathy and imitation. Other studies have shown that when we look at art, parts of the brain used to process emotion come into play. It is then said there is a relationship between emotion and aesthetic judgement. When we artists have struck a chord of understanding or emotion beyond just painting a likeness, the work has entered into another sphere.”

- *Linda Kooluris Dobbs*

“We have a shared history on the land. We are all related. We are all part of the human family. My job is to not just paint pretty pictures, but to really bring history to images, because for far too long indigenous people have been marginalized and misrepresented. Art can change the way citizens see history and reveal how we are all part of history.”

- *Phil Cote, Young Elder, Artist, Activist, Ancestral Knowledge Keeper & Historian*

Presentations were made to those who created the book; Sebastian Smith, photographer, Helen Breslauer, proofreader, editing, Lauren Malyk, layout and Hon. Henry Jackman whose generosity made the book possible. Those who provided valuable assistance, Lani Wilson, Curator of the Ontario Art Collection, David Bogart, Assembly staff and Larry Pfaff, Deputy Librarian, Art Gallery of Ontario were sincerely thanked for their valuable assistance.

Festivities concluded, our group of 50 or so adjourned to the adjoining room to listen to some great guitar jazz by Ernie Mee and Mark Crawford, and have some yummy desserts with our coffee. This was a great chance for the artists and other guests to meet one another. Lots of lively conversation to round out a memorable evening.



The Allwards in front of Walter Allward's last monument, Tribute to Democracy. Left to right: David Warner, Hugh Allward, Susan Allward, Doug Clarke, Jodi Allward, Scott Allward and Debbie Allward. All photos by Victoria Esterhammer.



Tobacco Ceremony, c. 1975
 Blake Debassige
 M'Chigeeng First Nation /
 Première Nation de M'Chigeeng
 On loan from the Ojibwe Cultural
 Foundation Museum / Prêt du musée de
 la fondation culturelle Ojibwe

A work of art by Blake Debassige.



InFormer editor David Warner with Pat Warner, Sebastian Smith and Sherri Warner.



O.A.F.P. administrator Mobina Bhimani.



Artists Greg Furmanczyk, Ron Kingswood, Philip Cote, Linda Dobbs, Phil Richards and Valerie Pitcher.



Ernie Mee and Mark Crawford providing the evening's entertainment.



Larry South, former M.P.P.



The Hon. Henry Jackman chats with artist Istvan Nyikos.

Upcoming Events

“Old friends pass away, new friends appear. It is just like the days. An old day passes, a new day arrives. The important thing is to make it meaningful: a meaningful friend - or a meaningful day.”

- *Dalai Lama*

And, so it is that we are planning another meaningful day.

Tuesday, September 24

The Annual General Meeting of the Ontario Association of Former Parliamentarians
and
Presentation of our Distinguished Service Award

Details about this special day will be sent out later, but for now – mark this one on the calendar, plan on joining us. Of course there is the business of successfully running our Association. There is also a wonderful opportunity to meet up with long time friends, meet our new members, celebrate, and enjoy each others' company.



Photo by Victoria Esterhammer.

Former Members Meet in Hamilton

Dr. Henry Jacek. Photo from YouTube.



It was the first regional meeting in many years. A group of 20 people, former MPPs, some accompanied by a spouse or partner, met at the Hamilton Club for dinner and a presentation which sparked a lively discussion. Prior to dinner we met in the Lounge. Fred Eisenberger, Mayor of Hamilton joined us for a while, bringing greetings from the City of Hamilton.

Ms. Sandy Shaw, M.P.P. for Hamilton West-Ancaster-Dundas paid tribute to the late Dr. Richard Allen, former Member for Hamilton West.

After a delicious dinner, Dr. Henry Jacek, Director of the Ontario Legislative Intern Program for 11 years and recently retired from McMaster University after 52 years, delivered a thoughtful and thought-provoking speech.

“Changes Which Would Create a More Civil Question Period”

By Dr. Henry Jacek

Dr. Jacek listed and explained the following suggestions as a way to develop a more civil atmosphere in the House during Question Period.

- Address the person by their surname instead of by the name of their Riding. Using the name of the Riding tends to depersonalize, whereas using someone’s name makes it a bit more personal.
- Reduce or eliminate the power of staff over Members when asking questions. Those who are elected should be the ones asking questions

- Ban clapping, banging the desks etc.
- Leaders get to ask more questions, 4 in total, but no supplementary questions. This would allow more backbench members the opportunities to ask questions.
- More authority for the Speaker to direct Cabinet Ministers to answer questions.
- After 40 minutes allow the Speaker to choose who will ask the questions.
- No “softball” questions from government backbenchers
- No “hand off” questions; that is, to whomever is asked the question is to answer the question or respond “I don’t know the answer, but will find out”
- “Two strikes and you’re out”; that is one warning by the Speaker about non-parliamentary language or behaviour, the second time the Member is removed from the House

Predictably, with an audience which included two former Speakers, several former Cabinet Ministers, and all former Members representing the three Parties, there was a spirited discussion about the pros and cons of Dr. Jacek’s suggestions.

There seemed to be a general consensus that the current atmosphere in the House, especially during Question Period, is not one of an appropriate level of civility.

It was an evening which featured an enjoyable social occasion along with an excellent discussion on an important topic. The evening was video recorded and when edited for length will be uploaded to our YouTube account. All former and current MPPs will be informed about how to access the video of this regional meeting.

The planning will now start on holding a meeting in another region.

Jean-Marc Lalonde

M.P.P. 1995 – 2011 Liberal, Glengarry-Prescott-Russell



*“Mister Hockey of
Eastern Ontario”*

After forty-seven years of being elected there are many meaningful memories, a long list of awards and medals and numerous achievements. Running parallel to Jean-Marc Lalonde’s remarkable political career is his exceptional hockey life.

Visit the small, bilingual Ontario town of Rockland, population 16,000 and you will find the Jean-Marc Lalonde Arena.

In 1953, Jean-Marc founded the Boom-boom Geoffrion minor hockey league in Rockland. In 1972 Jean-Marc purchased the Hull Festivals franchise of the Canadian Central Junior A hockey League. The team became known as the Rockland Nationals of the CCJHL. In 1975, Brian Murray became coach of the Rockland Nationals and won the Canadian Junior A Championship against Spruce Grove, Alberta.

In 1993, Jean-Marc Lalonde and three other partners purchased the Hull Olympics from the Quebec Major Junior Hockey League. The Hull Olympics won the Memorial Cup in 1997 and the team was coached by Claude Julien. Jean-Marc always had a passion for hockey. This was an opportunity to expand amateur hockey in eastern Ontario.

From Printer to Acting Director of the Canadian Government Printing Bureau

In 1956, Jean-Marc Lalonde started his public service career as a printer. Over the years he advanced to pressman, plant manager, area manager and then Acting Director, he also implemented and managed the technical training and development program for the National Printing Bureau. He was the person responsible for the operation of 104 printing installations across the country. When there was a major conference, such as the G7 in Montebello, the UN Habitat Conference in Vancouver and the International Monetary Fund Conference in Toronto, it was Jean-Marc’s responsibility to make sure every document was printed on time and to the highest standards.

“It was a lot of responsibility, which also came with great satisfaction in the end.”

The Lure of Politics

Being a member of the Rockland Town Council is a part-time occupation. Jean-Marc Lalonde was able to balance his regular job, town Councillor from 1962 to 1976, then Mayor for 15 years from 1976 to 1991, all the while pursuing his hockey passion. A desire to help build his community, to contribute to the growth of eastern Ontario.

In 1994, 6,000 people showed up at a Liberal provincial nomination and Jean-Marc was declared the official candidate for the Ontario Liberal Party. In 1995, Jean-Marc Lalonde began his first of four successive terms at Queen’s Park. During the 16 years, he serves as Parliamentary Assistant for the Ministries of: Transport, Economic Development, Health Promotion and Small Business and Entrepreneurship. He also served on a number of standing committees.

He enjoyed his time as M.P.P. He felt it was an honour to be elected in his riding and serve the people. From 2014 to 2018, Jean-Marc returned to politics as a municipal councillor in the town of Clarence-Rockland.

A Deeply Sad Turn of Events

In 2011, after 47 years in politics, travelling the world on behalf of the International Organisation of La Francophonie (APF), Jean-Marc thought it would be time to retire. He wanted him and his wife, Gisèle Lalonde, to spend precious time together and travel. Sadly, shortly after Jean-Marc announced his retirement, his wife passed away.

Memorable Legislative Moments

“There were many successes, but a few of which I am most proud are; getting \$100 million for the expansion of the Hawkesbury Hospital, passing an amendment to the Gift of Life Act, the passing of the Ontario – Quebec Labour Mobility Act, the amendments to the Voluntary Firefighters Act for insurance coverage and the passing of Bill 18 declaring the Ontario Franco-Ontarian flag as the official emblem of the Ontario francophone communities.

Medals, Awards, Accolades

- Order of Canada for his contributions in public service and promoting bilingualism services in both English and French in Ontario
- Legion of Honour from the President of France
- Grand Officier, Ordre of La Pléiade
- 3 Queen’s Medals
- Honorary Citizen of New Hampshire, Vermont, Maine and Louisiana

Campus Program

York University – March 11



Photo from York University.

A lively, engaging discussion, exchange of ideas, probing questions; all were featured at Professor Fanelli's York University class. John Hastings, David Warner and David Zimmer shared their views, prompting wonderful audience participation.

The topic was "Social Inequality Inside and Outside of the Labour Market: What is to be Done?", specifically:

- What accounts for the dramatic rise of income and wealth inequality in Canada?
- What implications might this have on upward social mobility and life chances?
- What are the major labour market challenges moving forward and how to respond?
- Are "good" jobs increasingly becoming a thing of the past? How should public policy respond?

"What I found interesting and enjoyable was that unlike the Question Period which all of us are familiar with, the three of us provided direct answers to the questions asked by the students and Professor Fanelli. It was a genuine exchange of ideas."

Seneca College

March 11



Left to right: Professor Olinski, John Parker, Barbara Sullivan and Steve Gilchrist.

Meanwhile, on the same day, at Professor Olinski's Paralegal class, three former MPPs were busy answering questions about "The Canadian Political System". The course is an introductory one and the students are from diverse academic backgrounds. The course is delivered from a federal perspective, with connections to the provinces.

The august panel of Steve Gilchrist, Barbara Sullivan and John Parker handled these questions: (unfortunately, Cheri DiNovo had to cancel at the last moment)

- The major difference between the different political parties and how parties operate
- The Canadian Constitution and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms
- Regionalism
- What exactly is the role of MP(P)?

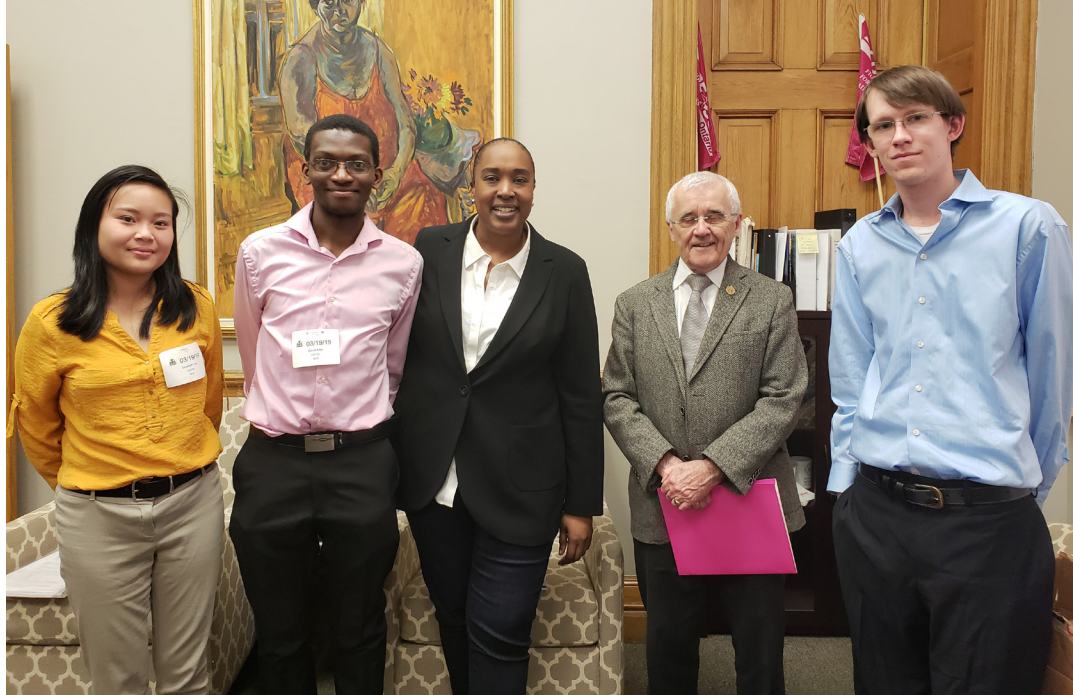
"It was a very good day, I thought, for the panellists who participated. The students asked pertinent questions, comprehended the different points of view that were espoused, and in the end, we ended up with a panel consensus on the archaic property tax regime. And the panellists were, as usual, both outrageously partisan and surprisingly collaborative, as they shared their experiences and insights. More like a Legislative Committee than Question Period, dare I say.

Despite the reality that this OAFP outreach engages few people, I was taken with Prof. Olinsky's private observation that a number of the 35 or so people in the Seneca class are seeking Canadian citizenship, and this is an important learning step in their journey. We may need to step up our communications game to respond to this."

- Barbara Sullivan

Job Shadow Program

March 19 and 20, 2019



Left to right Elizabeth Tao, David Adjci, MPP Jill Arthur, David Warner, Michael Tolkunow.

A full day at Queen’s Park is a reality check day. These bright, enthusiastic university students who have expressed an intense interest in the world of politics meet with MPPs, the Speaker, the Clerk, observe Question Period and sit in on the deliberations of a Committee. At the end of the day impressions are shared, questions asked and answered. Here are three of the students’ candid comments.

“I just wanted to email you to once again thank you for a spectacular day. Not only did I learn a lot about the role of an MP, but I learned a lot about myself and my interests today too.

I could not think of a better way that this could have gone. The day was neatly organized and even with any bumps in the road that we may have come across, there were other opportunities available for me to learn and appreciate the job of the legislative.

Thank you so much for answering all of my questions and for taking a genuine interest into my career exploration, education, and life in general.

Furthermore, please know how thankful I am for your insistence on the Intern Program, as that is something that sounds perfect for me and I would never have heard of it if not for you.”

-Anna

“I want to thank you for the experience today. It was a pleasure to hear and learn about your personal experiences from your time in office and how you and other MPPs carry out your duties. It was likewise a pleasure to have the opportunity to meet and converse with Mr. Decker, Ms. Andrew, Ms. Hunter, Mr. Arnott, and (in brief) Mr. Babikian.

That MPPs are tasked with handling long hours, a heavy workload, and living a very public life did not, in and of itself, come as a surprise to me. However, like anything that presents such an enormous challenge, I think the scale of the job needs to be seen to be truly appreciated. I believe I got that experience today.

Despite having been to Queen’s Park before, and arriving this morning with considerable existing knowledge about politics, I also feel I learned quite a lot, and am leaving with a better appreciation and understanding of the everyday function of our political system, including the role of committees, political staff, and the legislative staff.”

- Michael

“I would like to thank you for extending the opportunity for me to follow you around Queen’s Park and meet with several MPPs. My experience last week was very eye opening and gave me a better idea of what I which career I would like to pursue after my undergrad.

I am especially thankful that you gave me the opportunity to witness how politicians work on a provincial and municipal level. This was rather informative and the conversations we had with MPPs revealed a human aspect to the political system that I was previously unaware of.

Thanks once again for the wonderful opportunity on March 19th. I was very lucky to have met with you for the day to learn from your years of experience.”

- David

Members are unfailingly generous with their time and provide forthright answers to the students’ questions. Speaker Ted Arnott and Clerk Todd Decker are able to provide a comprehensive overview of how a parliament works.

At the end of a busy day, having an “inside” look at the world of politics, the reality check is often expressed by students as “It is fascinating. I would like to be a part of it, perhaps not elected, but involved in policy development or public service.”

This is a valuable program and I thank the Members of the House and the staff for being so helpful in making the program successful.

Ontario's North



Photo by Jake Graham photo.

Have you ever driven from Windsor to Timmins? It is about an 11 hour drive. How about Ottawa to Kenora? That drive is about 22 hours. And should you wish to drive to Moosonee from Toronto, you can't! You drive 8 hours to Cochrane, then have a 5 hour train ride to Moosonee.

Northern Ontario is a vast area, with a few cities, towns, scattered villages, sparsely populated in comparison with Southern Ontario. This beautiful region, with its tens of thousands of lakes and rivers, and magnificent forests, historically has provided incredible wealth from mining and forestry. Wealth, some northerners might argue, that has provided a good life for southerners. Featured is an article by Bud Wildman, MPP Algoma (1975-1999). If you have observations or comments, please pass them along for the Summer publication.

Urban Centralization and the Hollowing Out of Rural Communities

For over 30 years economic, social and political life has become more and more centralized in larger urban communities at the expense of small towns and rural areas across Ontario, Canada and, indeed, the western developed world. The population of Canada is being concentrated in fewer and fewer, larger and larger urban metropolises that sprawl farther and farther out into farm country. These centres swallow up and disappear old established rural communities. These accelerating changes have profound effects on our whole society and for rural life in Canada.

Northern Ontario has suffered from out-migration of its younger people from small towns to larger centres, as formerly cyclical resource-based industries have undergone longterm contraction or shut down completely. Jobs have been lost. Property values have dropped. In many communities unemployment or under-employment and low income levels have become chronic and communities have stagnated.

The few initiatives of either the public or private sectors have tended to be sporadic and unfocused. They have mostly failed to reverse this downward spiral.

No coherent public or private sector economic development strategy has been developed and implemented for Northern Ontario. Instead, for years, many Northern communities have placed all of their hopes for re-vitalizing the regional economy in the one basket of resource development—mining (and smelting) of minerals—in the Ring of Fire area. But up to now the stars: agreements with regional First Nations; construction of needed transportation routes; and strong world commodity markets;—have never aligned all at once. If/when the Ring of Fire resources are exploited, the cyclical nature of mining development—the booms followed by busts, so characteristic of the Northern economy—will inevitably play itself out once again.

Meanwhile, the rural and small town population is dropping and ageing, as young people leave to seek employment opportunities in larger urban centres. This often removes an important dynamic from the social and economic life of the community. Communities are being robbed of their life blood.

Small communities can be resilient, however. Some have re-branded themselves as retirement communities, and with some success have advertised lower real estate prices to attract even more seniors from urban areas who are looking for a quieter life in their retirement. (In the longer term though, these initiatives have unmasked the crying need for expanded community geriatric health and social services to meet the needs of the ageing residents. Too often these services are centralized in urban centres.)

Centralization of economic development and public services has become a fact of modern life, as both the private and public sectors attempt to achieve economies of scale. Despite globalization and the inter-connectivity of internet electronic communications (as broadband is slowly expanded across rural Canada), the private sector tends to locate new developments in services and manufacturing in urban centres at home and abroad, close to available workforce and/or consumer markets. In tandem with that centralization and concentration of private sector development, governments are accelerating the centralization of public services in urban centres.

In Ontario, this process was exacerbated and accelerated when the provincial government amalgamated municipalities and school boards in the late 1990s. Municipal and educational services were centralized farther away from the rural populations that they are supposed to serve. They became more distant from and less accessible to citizens. This was especially a problem for those rural seniors who lacked access to the internet or who were not social media savvy.

In Northern Ontario, some amalgamated school boards serve regions the geographic size of western Europe. Amalgamated boards began closing small rural schools, consolidating them into large mega-schools and transporting rural students for much longer distances. This change often had a devastating impact upon small towns, where the local schools had replaced the local churches of old, as the social centres of rural communities.

Governments also emulated these centralization in the health care and social services sectors as well. Hospitals were amalgamated and new hospitals constructed in urban centres. Social services agencies were given responsibility for delivering community services over enormous geographic areas. Health and social services planning and delivery across northeastern and northwestern Ontario were delegated to agencies headquartered in larger cities such as Sudbury and Thunder Bay, often at great distances from small remote communities not represented on the agencies' boards.

At the same time, government funding was restricted, as austerity programs were mandated. Budgets did not grow to keep pace with the cost of living or the expanding population of seniors, especially of the frail elderly. Community based services have not been expanded quickly enough, as hospitals began to discharge patients sooner and sicker. Services for children with special needs in rural Ontario required more funding, staffing and sophistication, which were not provided. Rural and Northern residents longed enviously for the higher levels of services available and closer at hand to residents in southern urban communities. Their tax dollars were not delivering similar levels of services or care.

As educational, health care and social services and employment opportunities dried up in small towns, it became more and more difficult to attract young professionals, such as family physicians, to locate in rural communities. If a community did not have a doctor, it was more difficult to attract other professionals, entrepreneurs and job seekers to locate there. It became a vicious circle—a continuing downward spiral.

The establishment of the Northern Ontario School of Medicine in Thunder Bay and Sudbury has assisted in attracting more physicians to communities in the North. But most family physician graduates who choose to stay in Northern Ontario are locating in the larger urban centres, rather than setting up practises in small, more remote towns. They seem to want to be close to larger hospitals and to medical specialists. This often means that patients must be transported long distances for appointments. (Northerners, who may have to travel four or five hours to access care, are rather chagrined when they hear southern rural residents express anger or concern about having to drive for half an hour or one hour to a hospital.) Medical professionals seem to want to live in more urban settings with access to more diverse cultural and social events.

The expansion of broadband internet services and global inter-connectivity, touted to mean that residents of all communities can have ready, virtual access to a plethora of experiences and opportunities, has seen a contraction and downsizing of local mainstream media outlets and news reporting in smaller communities. Global social media conglomerates are eating up the advertising revenues, and local TV stations and newspapers are contracting or closing up shop.

Those who still get their news from television or newspapers get it from cable TV or Canada's "national" newspapers, urban news stories from Toronto from flagship network stations (or American TV stations from across the border) or large GTA urban newspapers, not local or regional news. (Toronto news outlets—three or four large newspapers and five or six major television stations – are an anomaly in Canada, compared to the limited media in most communities.) Most Northerners daily hear more crime stories from Toronto or Detroit now than stories about issues in their own regions. What effect does this have for a sense of local community?

There is one element of population expansion in rural Northern Ontario. The only demographic that is growing in the North is the Indigenous population. And over 50 per cent of the Indigenous population is under the age of 25. There is a growing sense of confidence and solidarity among the Indigenous peoples of the North.

Historically, Canada has failed to fulfill its responsibilities to Indigenous communities. They suffer from chronic low levels of economic and social development and high levels of unemployment and poverty. The Indigenous people are generally poorly educated and need to obtain the skills required to reach their full potentials to deal with the challenges facing their communities. This is a serious waste of human capital. There is a great opportunity to equip Indigenous young people with the skills, the confidence and the financial resources to tackle the challenge to develop their communities economically and socially...themselves. A significant effort to expand culturally appropriate educational opportunities for Indigenous youth must be mounted across the North, as part of our response to the 94 Calls to Action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Many remote First Nations communities have severe housing shortages and horrendous overcrowding. Many have been under boil water orders for many years. They must have the opportunity to benefit from their own initiatives on their own traditional territories. They must be able to empower their communities to chart their own courses to development that they deem appropriate. As the Indigenous communities develop economically and socially, all of Northern Ontario and the whole province will benefit.

Too often, the economic and social stagnation of many Northern communities has been accompanied and exacerbated by harmful side effects such as growing feelings of alienation and dislocation. These have contributed to social dysfunction and the humiliation of substance spacing problem here? abuse and addictions, both in non-Indigenous and in First Nations communities. As in so many other communities across North America, the opioid crisis seems to be expanding rapidly in Northern and rural areas (and health care and social services agencies have been too slow in responding). Drug abuse is destroying lives and decimating too many families.

Centralization and out-migration, particularly of young people, have led to the hollowing out of many small, rural and Northern communities in Ontario. Overall, rural population is decreasing and ageing. Communities have stagnated economically and socially. Inadequate, unresponsive and/or too distant educational, health care and social services have plagued Northerners and have contributed to feelings of malaise, isolation and alienation. There must be a concerted public commitment and significant investment in community-based health care and social services to meet the challenges facing Northern rural non-Indigenous and First Nations communities.

There is an opportunity, with expanded Indigenous education, to equip Indigenous youth with the skills they require to lead their communities to develop economically and socially. It remains to be seen whether governments are prepared to recognize and analyze the problems, to devise solutions and to invest the human and fiscal resources needed to begin to turn around the decline of rural and Northern communities.

- Bud Wildman, MPP Algoma (1975-1999)



Bud Wildman. Photo by Darren Taylor/*Soo Today*.

What urban MPPs should know about rural Ontario

“The first thing they should know is that rural Ontario is complex. The second thing they should know is to listen to the farmers.”

- *Maria Van Bommel*

Maria Van Bommel is the former Member from Lambton-Kent-Middlesex (2003 – 2011), a riding about the size of Prince Edward Island. When Maria talks about rural Ontario, not only is she passionate about farming, but she is well qualified to talk about the issues. She and her husband used to own a poultry farm near Strathroy, Ontario, was a provincial director of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, a founding member of the Ontario Farm Women’s Network and the Canadian Farm Women’s Network and during her time at Queen’s Park was Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. Today, while semi-retired, is still involved in the accounting for the poultry farm now owned by her son and his family. She is also the vice chair of Agricorp, a provincial agency mandated to deliver risk management programs and services to Ontario’s farmers.

Our Electronic World

Maria Van Bommel talked about the complexity of rural Ontario. “I am near the highway 401 corridor, so access to specialized services is within commuting distance. This is far from the reality for rural residents in some other parts of the province.”

I am a city dweller, born and raised in Toronto, spent almost all of my life in Ontario’s capital. I made the assumption that everyone has internet access. Maria Van Bommel disavowed me of that notion. “My daughter is a rural resident, just a 20 minute drive from London and she did not have internet service until 2018. My grandson was often here to take advantage of the internet in order to do his homework.” She went on to explain the complexity of the internet situation.

“A lot of farmers have off-farm jobs. In order to adequately manage the farm and for some as a condition of insurance coverage of the farm, the farmer needs to be able to electronically monitor the farm while away. So, the cell phone and internet service is critical. Modern agricultural business relies on the internet.”

Are There Urban Policy Decisions Which can Have a Negative Effect on Rural Ontario?

“Land use policies often bring unintended consequences. The province wants to establish a ‘Green Belt’, an effort to prevent urban sprawl. While that’s a good goal, the result may be that some farmers end up with land which is not suitable for farming.”

What are the Most Important Rural Issues Today?

“In addition to internet service, the fact of rural life often means a lack of timely medical care. Farmers can live hours away from a hospital or even ambulance service. The cost of electricity is a major factor in running a farm. The delivery charge for electricity is higher in rural Ontario because of the distances involved.”

From Strathroy to Queen’s Park

Maria Van Bommel expressed how she enjoyed her time at Queen’s Park. It was however, an adjustment to go from a rural setting to spending time in Toronto. “When I would go into town I would smile and say hello to everyone I met. That’s normal in the country. I tried the same approach on the subway in Toronto. Strangers eyed me with suspicion. Yet, overall I enjoyed my two terms, especially when I was visiting various communities in the riding, attending rural events and meeting my constituents.”

The former Member for Lambton-Kent-Middlesex is rightfully proud of the passage of her Private Members’ Bill (115), the Ontario Award for Paramedic Bravery Act. She had another Private Members’ Bill which garnered all-Party support, the Elimination of Ground Current Pollution (Bill 161). Stray voltage, usually caused by antiquated electrical distribution infrastructure, can disable or even kill farm animals. Despite having the support of all 3 political Parties, the Bill never made it into law.

An Expanding Rural - Urban Gap

The population shift from the country to the city continues. Representation at Queen’s Park is based on population. The end result, to quote Maria Van Bommel, is “The voice of the farmer, of rural people, is not being heard.”

An Editor's Note

The obituaries until now have focused on the parliamentary life of the former Member and how she or he was viewed by colleagues. What has been missing in the obituaries is the former Member's background and what the person's "life after politics." I am attempting to change that approach, starting with the Spring 2019 publication.

Perhaps I can create a more complete picture of the person we knew as a parliamentary colleague.



Photo by Victoria Esterhammer.

In loving memory of
Alexander Richard Allen



Photo from Hamilton Spectator.

(February 10, 1929 - March 5, 2019)

Served in the 32nd, 33rd, 34th and 35th Parliaments (June 17, 1982 – June 17, 1995)

Richard Allen held three Cabinet posts (Housing, Social Development, Colleges and Universities) and was Minister Without Portfolio. During his tenure at Queen's Park Richard was on the Select Committee on Constitutional and Intergovernmental Affairs, Vice-Chair of the Committee on Social Development, and a member of two other committees (Constitutional Reform, General Government).

Biographical Information

Born and raised in Vancouver, British Columbia

Has a B.A. (University of Toronto), M.A. (University of Saskatchewan), PhD (Duke University)

Professor at University of Regina (1964-1974)

Senior Canadian Historian at McMaster University, Hamilton (1974-1987)

Published the following books:

The Social Passion, 1971

Region of the Mind: Interpreting the Western Canadian Plains, 1973

Religion and society in the prairie west, 1975

Man and Nature on the Prairie, 1976

The Social Gospel in Canada (editor), 1975

Sun Bright and Well Beloved: Three Hundred Years of a North American Family and their Farther Past, 1998

The View from Murney Tower: Salem Bland, the Late Victorian Controversies, and the Search for a New Christianity, 2008

Beyond the Noise of Your Solemn Assemblies: The Protestant Ethic and the Quest for Social Justice in Canada, a collection of his essays that further explore the life of the "social gospel" in Canada.

*Richard was about to launch this book when he passed away.

Post 1995 election: Richard was chairperson of the Board of Wesley Urban Ministries in Hamilton (1996-2001) and resumed a career of historical research and writing.

He was married (Nettie Allen) and has two children.

“Richard was a gentle man in the true sense of the word(s). He lived out his commitment to the social gospel and to the struggle for social justice. He deeply cared for all who were vulnerable or oppressed. Richard made very significant contributions to academia, to scholarship and the historical record and analysis and to public life throughout his long career. All of us who knew him and worked with him as colleagues benefitted from his reason, patience and wisdom.

Richard wrote beautifully. Anne and I always enjoyed reading his annual newsletters he sent to us at Christmastime.

I considered him a true friend and, as we have lived at a distance from each other in recent years, I have missed our discussions on many topics. I know he will be greatly missed by many.”
- Bud Wildman

“Richard Allen was elected an MPP when I served in the Bill Davis election in 1982. He was a kind, serious and respectful politician. I always listened to him as he was thoughtful and balanced in his approach. He was pleasant to be with and I considered him a friend who I could trust. He was always working in the public interest and was never partisan in his approach. He was an honest decent man who will be missed by all who had the privilege of knowing him during his life time.”
- Norman Sterling (former PC MPP)

“I was very saddened to hear the recent news that Richard Allen had died. For me, Richard Allen was the model of what an elected official should aspire to be. In the many years we served together at Queen’s Park, he was unfailingly courteous and constructive. From my days as a history student in university, I knew that Richard was a scholar - and I might add a very good one.

Our time together at Queen’s Park taught me that this scholar was also a gentleman. When I was minister of education in the mid to late 1980s, Richard was the NDP education critic. During the stressful time when we were dealing with the contentious separate school legislation right after the 1985 Ontario general election, Richard played an important and constructive role in the consideration that legislation, especially during the many months of committee hearings.

In the early 1990s when he served as a cabinet minister during the Rae government, Richard handled difficult files with aplomb and apparent ease. He knew his brief and he radiated competence and compassion. It was a pleasure and an honour to have known him and to have considered him a friend and colleague.”

- Sean Conway

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