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Bill Rea ? Tory may be on right road

One of the main reasons I would never want to get into politics is one is forbidden to ever change their mind.

The media has a long memory, and the people within the media are in habit of digging up old statements from elected officials and standing them up against current positions. I have done that a couple of times myself, and I firmly believe most of the occasions were fully justified.

On the other hand, having never being elected to office, or having sought such election, I don't know what it's like once you ?get in there.? Common sense tells me (and should tell anyone) that there's a significant difference between being on the campaign trail and actually in office. If you want an example, check out whether there's a wall between the United States and Mexico four years from now. I'll bet you there won't be, despite what Donald Trump has been promising. I'll also predict he gets away with it too. Whether he wins or loses his bid for re-election, that wall won't be an issue.

I have been thinking about these things a lot over the last couple of days, in light of Toronto Mayor John Tory's announcement that he was thinking of turning the Don Valley Parkway and the Gardiner Expressway into toll roads.

This was something Tory had spoken out against in previous election campaigns.

It's certainly not the first time we have seen someone run for office on certain promises, and then change their mind some time after the election. Pierre Trudeau campaigned for re-election in 1974 opposing wage and price controls, and about a year later we got the Anti-Inflation Board, which was set up to administer wage and price controls.

Dalton McGuinty became Ontario's Premier in 2003 with a promise not to raise taxes, and in his first budget, he presented us with the Health Care Premium, which was a substantial tax increase that we're still paying. For reasons that I have never been able to understand, McGuinty and company were re-elected in 2007.

It doesn't always work that way.

?Read my lips. No new taxes.?

George H.W. Bush used those very words to become President of the United States. He was later forced to go back on that promise in order to get legislators to approve a budget. He was hammered for that in his unsuccessful bid for re-election.

I'm sure many people can come up with other examples.

These could be cases of people making promises they genuinely intended to keep, or they could be cases of out-and-out lies uttered in order to sway voters. I have my opinions, and you have yours.

And before the media gets too uppity on this, members of that . . . er . . . whatever it is should ask themselves if they have ever changed their minds on an issue.

I have lots of times.

Thirty-something years ago, when I started in this business and began putting my thoughts on the public record in this forum, I was a young kid with excessively-long brown hair who was staunchly in favour of capital punishment. Today, I am an old man with excessively-long grey hair who is vehemently opposed to the death penalty.

More into our current time frame, a year ago, I looked forward to the idea of a Donald Trump presidency in the U.S. with dread. Now I feel a certain amount of anticipation.

So I agree that John Tory is going back on his word when it comes to setting up toll roads, but I'm also willing to give him the benefit of the doubt that he has learned some things in the roughly two years he's been in office.

It's also a fact that he's got a city that's not working very well. The last couple of times I've driven downtown has been ordeals. Hardly a week goes by that we don't hear some horror story about the transit system.

I still have family living in the city, but they are all in the west end, so getting to their places presents relatively few problems. If I have to go deeper into the city, I take TTC, and I always carry a supply of tokens in case an unanticipated trip Down Town becomes necessary.

I think Tory knows what needs to be done to fix the situation, but he's got to somehow come up with the money. Placing tolls on these two roads could be a way to raise it.

There are sure to be people who object. For one thing, how do they know the extra money is going to go toward fixing transportation issues in Toronto? People are understandably cynical these days about how government uses money.

And how is the charge to be assessed? Are licence plates to be photographed, as they are on Highway 407? And will people be able to get transponders, as many (myself included) have for the 407?

That raises another issue. I don't drive the 407 much. Even with the transponder, it's still an expense. But when I do drive it, it's relatively easy, with very little traffic. In other words, a lot of people don't drive it.

How many people will drive the Gardiner or DVP if they have to pay for the privilege? One has to wonder what good tolls are going to be if motorists insist on driving the other already over-crowded roads to save a couple of bucks.

One problem I have always had with toll roads is they use technology to charge people for the perfectly legal act of driving on a public highway, yet there are many who squawk at the thought of using technology to charge people for the illegal act of excessively speeding on such a highway. It's been announced that Provincial legislation is coming to allow municipalities to implement photo radar in areas like school zones.

I have written many times that I was a fan of photo radar. There were those who called it a cash grab, and I agree with them. But it was my kind of cash grab, because all the money paid was voluntary. I drove 400-series highways every day the program was in effect in the mid 1990s, and never paid a dime to the pot, because I chose not to speed excessively.

The big problem with cash grabs, of course, is what the government does with all the extra scratch. I have always though Mike Harris did a lot of good things while in office (and a lot of dreadful things too). Selling the 407 is something I'll never forgive him for.

I would be reluctant to put more money into Kathleen Wynne's mitts. Her track record when it comes to responsible money management leaves a lot to be desired. I'm prepared to cut Tory some more slack, but that shouldn't be too surprising. If I had had my way, he'd have Wynne's job today.