

Best of Canada Showcase

by BROCK WEIR

Earlier this month, the Prime Minister made an important announcement that barely caused a ripple in our collective conversation.

The announcement in question was made on Thursday, August 3.

Maybe it didn't really register because it came on the heels of a personal announcement made jointly by he and his wife the day before, one which seems to have sent politicians across the country disproportionately agog about something that really has nothing to do with the rest of us.

As this transpired, the Prime Minister's Office announced the appointment of Edith Dumont as the incoming Lieutenant-Governor of Ontario, set to succeed long-serving LG Elizabeth Dowdeswell sometime this fall.

‘A passionate educator, Ms. Dumont is a special education teacher, a school principal, and an executive,’ said the PMO in its announcement. ‘She was the first woman to lead the Conseil des écoles publiques de l'Est de l'Ontario. Most recently, she served as Vice-President of Partnerships, Communities, and International Relations at the Université de l'Ontario français, in Toronto.

‘Ms. Dumont is a proud Franco-Ontarian who has devoted the last three decades of her career to supporting Francophone communities in the province, across Canada and beyond. Her life-long commitment to education, leadership, and community service, along with her dedication to ensuring quality education in French, have had a long-lasting impact on Ontario's Francophone communities and the vitality of the French language in the Province.

‘When she assumes office, Ms. Dumont will be the first Franco-Ontarian Lieutenant Governor in the province's history. The Prime Minister thanked the outgoing Lieutenant Governor, the Hon. Elizabeth Dowdeswell, for her dedication and service to the people of Ontario. Her many years of public service and commitment to community engagement have made a lasting impact for Ontarians.’

You might ask, ‘So what?’ The work of Ontario's Lieutenant-Governors, or any of the other nine Provincial Lieutenant Governors for that matter, is not something that often catches front page headlines, hits the top story on the evening news, or rises to the top of your newsfeeds on your social media channel of choice – although, it seems, very little Canadian news rises to the top on social media these days, but that's the subject of another, potentially far lengthier column!

Well, in my view, the ‘So what?’ is more than evident if we take the time to scratch just beyond the surface.

Lieutenant Governors represent The King at the Provincial level, similar to how the Governor-General of Canada represents the Monarch at the Federal level.

According to the Government of Canada, the duties of the Lieutenant Governor, who are appointed by the Governor-General on the recommendation of the Prime Minister, include swearing in the Provincial government's Executive Council (Premier & Cabinet), opening each session of the Provincial Legislature, and providing Royal Assent to Provincial bills.

Those are the nuts and bolts of the job, but there are other duties that have been added along the way, ‘soft powers,’ as they are called in some quarters as they're not delineated formally but have become part of the gig.

These include ‘promoting a sense of identity,’ ‘acting as the Province's official host, supporting social causes, and recognizing outstanding citizens.’

While these are the ‘essentials’ of the office, in my view, that are at the heart of the office.

In promoting a sense of identity, acting as the Province's official host, supporting social causes and recognizing outstanding citizens, they do so without the political baggage that can often come when these duties are taken on by an elected official, regardless of which political stripe such an official might represent.

They can promote elements of what might be considered Ontario's 'identity' without getting bogged down in the prevailing political ideology of the day; they can act as the Province's official host, showcasing the 'Best of Ontario' to dignitaries from around the country, around the world, and other bodies, without the political heft that might make things awkward; support social causes in a fulsome way, regardless of how the fortunes of such causes can hinge on the political winds of the day, and recognize outstanding citizens in a way that keeps it removed from any semblance of political patronage.

Stepping back to look at Lieutenant Governors nation-wide, the King really is represented by a bevy of outstanding citizens that truly represent a cross-section of Canadian excellence, as well.

In British Columbia, for instance, Lieutenant Governor Janet Austin came to the position after 15 years as CEO of YWCA Metro Vancouver, a position which allowed her to come into the job with her finger on the pulse of the community, particularly young women and girls.

Moving east, Alberta Lieutenant Governor Salma Lakhani is the first South Asian and Muslim person to hold viceregal office in the country, came into office following a lengthy career with community-building and work with youth. Saskatchewan's Lieutenant Governor, Russell Mirasty, the Province's first Indigenous representative, was appointed to the position after a lengthy career with the RCMP.

Anita Neville, who represents the King in Manitoba, came into the position after 10 years representing the Province in the House of Commons, and after stints in business and nearly 15 years as a school trustee.

Here in Ontario, Dowdeswell came into office following a lengthy career in public service, including helping draft the Framework Convention on Climate Change, leading the United Nations Environmental Programme, and serving as an educator. In Quebec, J. Michel Doyon, a lawyer, writer and historian, serves with a background that is perfect for an office with such deep historical roots; while former municipal councillor and advocate Brenda Murphy, holds the position of Lieutenant Governor of New Brunswick, and the distinction of being the first openly 2SLGBTQIA+ person to represent the monarch in our country's history.

Continuing our trip, Nova Scotia Lieutenant Governor Arthur LeBlanc joined the vice regal team after nearly 20 years of service as a Justice on the Supreme Court of Nova Scotia, while Antoinette Perry, a former school teacher of Acadian heritage performs the role in Prince Edward Island. Rounding out the Provincial vice-regals in Newfoundland and Labrador is Lieutenant Governor Judy Foote, previously a member of the Federal Government who served as Minister of Public Services and Procurement and Receiver General of Canada.

Shortly after her appointment seven years ago, outgoing Lieutenant Governor Elizabeth Dowdeswell, in an interview, summed up how she saw her position. She saw it as her duty to 'ensure the integrity of the crown in Canada, but a real opportunity to serve Ontarians in a variety of ways.'

'I said I wanted to spend a couple of months listening to Ontarians to find out what they were really concerned about and what they wanted me to focus on,' she said. 'I have talked to literally hundreds of Ontarians over the past few months and I am starting to understand how proud they are of this Province and what they want to do to show this Province to the rest of the world.'

In Elizabeth Dowdeswell, Ontario found just the right person to do that, and I'm sure this will continue with Ms. Dumont.