

Editorial ? Some good points, but pointless

If she hasn't received it already, Premier Kathleen Wynne can look forward to getting letter from Peel Regional councillors, and it's almost certainly going to contain a bawling out.

Councillors are angry about the passage of Bill 70, which received Royal Assent in December. The bill calls for the election at large of the Chairs in Peel, York and Niagara Regions. The Peel councillors are upset because they believe they were not properly consulted, and their positions on the issue were basically ignored.

We agree that Regional councillors have every right to be annoyed, although we don't think they should have been surprised. Some of them commented that the swift passage of the bill was disrespectful municipal government. The fact is the Province has a long history of treating municipal government with contempt, bringing in changes without consulting either elected officials or the electorate. Bill 70 is a recent example of a long series of disrespectful moves.

Wynne's announcement last week that she was shutting the door on Toronto setting up toll roads is a more recent example of sticking it to municipalities.

Heading into the 2010 municipal elections, the powers that be at Queen's Park decided they would be held in October, rather than November. There were some valid reasons for doing this, but could not the people more impacted by this have been consulted? Terms in municipal office in Ontario used to be three years in length. During the first decade of the 21st century, the Province decided to make them four years.

Were you consulted on this? Were your elected representatives consulted? They were not.

Again, there might have been some valid reasons, but we would argue there is a difference between asking a person to make a three-year commitment when seeking elected office and four years. Input should have been sought. It wasn't.

Don't get the idea that we're beating up on the Liberals here. The Progressive Conservatives have shown that they can be just as contemptuous of municipal politicians and voters.

The main talking point in Toronto 20 years ago was the Province's plans to amalgamate the six municipalities that made up the Metro level of government into one entity, commonly known as the Megacity. This was the brain child of the government of then Premier Mike Harris. There was absolutely no consultation when this idea was floated. There was plenty of input, to be sure, but the government of the day made it clear it wasn't interested. When it came to public reaction from the taxpayers, the government could not possibly have been more contemptuous. The electorate could essentially go to hell, as far as Harris and company were concerned.

That didn't mean there wasn't some noise made. People opposed to the Megacity idea formed a group called Citizens For Local Democracy (C4LD). They, along with municipal officials, demanded a referendum be held. The government, not surprisingly, refused. So they organized their own.

Referendum day was March 3, 1997, and 76.1 per cent of those who voted were opposed to the amalgamation. It was clear the electorate wanted nothing to do with it. Those who question that conclusion will please produce the figures that contradict that 76.1 per cent.

There were a couple of victory parties thrown by the opponents of the plan, including one at Massey Hall in downtown Toronto. One of the key organizers of the referendum was on the stage at the venerable concert hall, enthusiastically scrawling updated vote figures on a flip chart. That woman as Kathleen Wynne.

She understood then that the Province should show more respect to municipal government. We have to wonder, therefore, what changed her mind.

We are glad that the Regional councillors are giving the Premier a piece of their collective mind. On the other hand, it's not going to change anything, and we think those councillors realize that. The fact is the Wynne Liberals were given the authority to push the bill through June 12, 2014, when Ontario voters gave them a majority.

Nevertheless, the points to be made are valid ones, and deserve at least to be on the record.