

From Queen's Park by Sylvia Jones MPP ? Gas plant trail leads to guilty verdict



Last week, the verdict for the gas plant trial of two of then premier Dalton McGuinty's most senior advisors was handed down. McGuinty's Chief of Staff David Livingston was found guilty of destroying documents in relation to the cancellation of two natural gas power plants, one in Mississauga and another in Oakville. Deputy Chief of Staff Laura Miller was found not guilty. The cancellation would cost Ontario taxpayers \$1.1 billion.

Initially, the Liberals dismissed any problems with the cost of the cancellation by saying that it would only cost taxpayers "less than a cup of coffee a year." The actual cost was revealed by the independent officer of the Legislature, the Auditor General. The Auditor found that the cancellation of the two plants would cost Ontarians a staggering \$1.1 billion.

This \$1.1 billion decision was made days before the 2011 election by the Liberal campaign team in an attempt to save Liberal seats. This election campaign was co-chaired by Kathleen Wynne.

David Livingston was charged and convicted of destroying documents related to this \$1.1 billion scandal. Specifically, Livingston deceptively obtained administrative system passwords which were used to wipe 20 hard drives in the Premier's Office, despite being told by civil servants of his responsibility to retain the very records he erased.

It is a sad reality that a premier's most senior official has been found guilty of trying to orchestrate a cover-up of the \$1.1 billion gas plant scandal. Unfortunately, scandal is nothing new to the Liberal government.

After 15 years, there are many examples of expensive government mismanagement and waste. For example, the \$4 billion extra that Ontarians will have to pay due to the Liberals trying to hide the true cost of fixing their hydro mistakes. The government made up complex accounting rules so that the true cost would not appear on their books. As a result, Ontarians will have to pay \$4 billion more than necessary. You can also look at the over \$50,000 spent on luxury Canada Goose jackets for staff, or the \$17.4 million spent on partisan advertising, meant to boost the Liberals' polling numbers. Ontarians are tired of having their taxpayer dollars wasted on projects they neither want or need.

That is why Patrick Brown, the Progressive Conservative caucus and I believe that the government needs to be more accountable to the people of Ontario. We believe that the government needs to introduce the first ever Trust, Integrity and Accountability Act, close lobbying and fundraising loopholes, establish clear performance targets for Ministers and restore the Auditor General's oversight of government advertising.

This guilty verdict will not return the \$1.1 billion the Liberal government wasted, but it is a very expensive example of how far the Liberal government will go to protect their own interests above the people of Ontario's.