

He?s Baaacck?.

by SHERALYN ROMAN

After a year of hard work (51 days) and a clearly well-earned 14-week break (the sheer audacity) our Premier has seen fit to return to that which he was elected to do by only 43% of voters. In just one day, he has already shown us how little he cares for the people who elected him, the well-being of the province and the democratic process in general, already something for which he has previously shown his true colours. He's baaacck, and we are all the worse for it.

While Mr. Ford has so little respect for the education system, I would actually like to borrow a tool from it by providing a report card highlighting all that we should be concerned about. After all, rest assured much of what Mr. Ford is doing right now directly impacts, and/or has the potential to impact, all Caledon residents.

Education: Grade ?F?

There is the small matter of Ford taking control of his eighth school board, removing duly elected trustees, thereby ensuring whether your children attend Catholic or Public School here in Caledon, you no longer have a voice in their education. Local school trustees like Stan Cameron, who not only advocate regularly for families, but are also instrumental in helping to establish new and innovative programming like a vegetable garden in every school, are now completely sidelined, their email addresses removed from the board's website and families left with no one to turn to for support. Well paid Ministry appointed supervisors now run the eight school boards in question, with salaries in the hundreds of thousands, vs. trustees who were elected by you, to represent you, and who earned a very small honoraria for doing so. Why is Ford taking over school boards? Who benefits? Who represents parents now? It's unlikely we'll get them but we need answers. Now.

Still on education: Grade ?D-?

You will never convince me otherwise; an educated populace is the best possible outcome for a nation. Education, and easy access to it, are the hallmarks of a well-functioning society. The recently decimated OSAP (Ontario Student Assistance Program) is a prime example of a failure by the government to recognize the importance of education. Then again, having left school in Grade 11 and handed an already established business to run, perhaps the Premier thinks the rest of us don't need an education either. I've assigned a grade of D- instead of ?F? only because like any government program I'm sure OSAP might have needed a little tweaking. However, by removing access to education by way of supportive funding, Ford directly impacts those who need it most, marginalized and under-serviced communities already struggling.

The environment: Grade ?F?

This one matters to us, Caledon. With CBM/Votorantim proposing a massive, below-the-water-line blasting quarry for Alton, decimation of the surrounding environment is certain. Area wells, groundwater, the Credit River system, loss of tree cover and habitat - it's all at risk. Caledon's Site Alteration ByLaw (proposed, but still not revealed to residents) has already had many of its proposals disallowed by the Ford government. The ongoing battle against allowing construction fill to be dumped in defunct Caledon area pits, or worse, into fully rehabilitated lakes, suggests we are at the epicentre of an environmental disaster. Add in what's potentially happening as part of Bill 60, where our entire water system could well fall into the hands of private corporations, and there's no predicting what could go wrong. Or is there? Walkerton comes to mind.

On Democracy: Grade ?F?

In addition to education, another fundamental of a democracy is the freedom to question the integrity of the government and hold it to account. The PC government has been fighting Freedom of Information requests in court for years. Specifically, at every step, Mr. Ford has challenged our right to see what goes into government decision making processes. Despite legally being directed by the

courts to disclose the contents of his phone (including texts and emails that may be related to the greenbelt scandal) Ford has not only refused, but is now threatening to actually change the law instead. Citing everything from constituent privacy to 'Chinese communists,' Ford simply chooses to ignore the democratic process and the courts. I mean, that's how it works in most authoritarian nations right? Oops, I mean democratic.

We could go on and on. The never-ending report card on a government seemingly hell-bent on refusing to be held to account for anything. Who cares about report cards when we can change the law to suit our needs. Who cares about democracy when we can simply seize airport property calling it a 'special economic zone,' which sounds suspiciously similar to an MZO to me. Caledon has had their fair share of those. Who cares about any of this? You should.

Everything from the air we breathe, to the water we drink, to how development happens here in Caledon is at grave risk because of the decisions not only of Mr. Ford and his government, but other like-minded fellow politicians are making. Then again, without equal access to education, with the removal of democratically elected school trustees, and changes to the Freedom of Information Act - plus, allowing us poor, thirsty citizens to bring our own booze to the park (did we ask for that) perhaps soon enough, none of us will be capable of caring.

Access to information, NO. Booze? Sure.