

Claire Hoy ? Peter Kormos MPP, maverick

Politicians, like other people, come and go. Some are good. Some aren't. Some are self-serving egomaniacs. Others genuinely try to make things better, at least what they see as making it better. Some are boring. Others are flamboyant. Most aren't particularly memorable. But a few are.

One of those was long-time Welland NDP MPP Peter Kormos. He died Saturday at age 60. Kormos had a series of health issues, but his death has been ruled natural causes.

Regular readers will know that your humble correspondent isn't in the habit of lauding politicians of any kind, let alone New Democrats.

Yet there was something about Kormos, an honesty, a passion for people and for his beliefs that I have rarely seen matched in almost 50 years of chasing politicians around the block.

He was, without doubt, his own man. Misguided? From my perspective, yes. But he was fanatically true to his beliefs and to himself, a rarity in politics at any level.

A lawyer, he spent 23 years in the Legislature, retiring before the 2011 election after various health issues, including Bell's Palsy, made life difficult for him. Even so, he ran for a seat on the Niagara Regional Council and spent a considerable amount of time commenting on radio or television about the issues of the day.

That's where I really got to know him. For almost 12 years, I was a regular on the Michael Coren Show on Crossroads Television Systems. Coren ? unlike many television hosts ? actually enjoyed guests with conflicting points of view, and Kormos often appeared as a representative of the left.

He could duke it out with the best of them. He wouldn't give an inch if he thought he was in the right, but, unlike the majority of left-leaning ideologues, he was big enough to concede a point if he thought it was a valid one.

In his early Queen's Park career, you could see him coming for miles around. Driving a sporty Corvette and flashing fancy cowboy boots, Kormos wasn't enamored over the custom of men wearing ties in the Legislature, a distaste which actually prompted a Liberal MPP to propose a motion ? which was passed in the early McGuinty years ? calling for a dress code. So what did Kormos do? He showed up the next day wearing a tuxedo.

He was clearly more suited for opposition than government, a reality then NDP premier Bob Rae discovered, much to his chagrin, when he elevated Kormos to the inner sanctum after the NDP's surprise provincial victory in 1990.

As you likely know, ministers are expected to score their debating points ? assuming they don't agree with what is being proposed ? in the privacy of the cabinet room. But Kormos was incensed when Rae reneged on his election promise to introduce public auto insurance ? a promise Rae, no doubt, thought he'd never have to act upon ? that he publicly disputed his own government's cowardly retreat and was subsequently booted out of cabinet.

Oh yes, Rae wasn't honest enough to say why he tossed Kormos out. Instead, he feigned great outrage when Kormos appeared as a Sunshine Boy in the Toronto Sun, fully dressed mind you, leaning against his Corvette.

In response, Kormos entered the 1966 NDP leadership contest ? after Ontarians had come to their senses and kicked Rae and his crew out of office ? not because he thought he could win, but because he didn't want Rae's surrogate, Francis Lankin, to defeat Howard Hampton. Hampton won.

In 1990, Kormos launched a 17-hour filibuster against the McGuinty government's no-fault auto insurance plan. It wasn't for show, it was, as usual, from the heart.

Like all mavericks, he stepped on a lot of toes. But it's doubtful there is any politician ? or, for that matter, any journalist - who knew him who did not respect him for his genuineness.

He lived hard and he worked hard and he died far too young.

Veteran Liberal Jim Bradley, also from the Niagara Region, points out that Kormos ?was one of the few people who actually read a bill from cover to cover.?

Bradley told the Toronto Star, ?it's almost a cliché to say it, but he was one of a kind in the legislature.?

He certainly was. And may God bless his soul.

