

Recalling politicians would have consequences, like cost

By Bill Rea

Voters should have the opportunity to fire elected officials if they don't behave properly.

That's what Lanark-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington MPP Randy Hillier would like to see. He has called on Premier Kathleen Wynne in an open letter to fast track his private member's bill that allows for the recall of Members of Provincial Parliament. The Progressive Conservative MPP has suggested his bill could be easily amended to include all municipally-elected officials. Dufferin-Caledon MPP Sylvia Jones said this bill has been introduced before, and it's been reported that the possibility of expanding it to include municipal politicians has been raised in light of the recent controversies involving Toronto Mayor Rob Ford. While it has become easy to see the international attention associated with the controversy and actions of the Mayor of Toronto, said Hillier in a statement on his website, what is unfortunately overlooked is that Toronto is not the only municipality with concerns over the accountability of their elected representatives.

Hillier's bill would allow for the recall of any MPP if a petition is signed by 25 per cent of the number of voters who cast a ballot in the previous election. If that threshold is met, a recall election would be called, and the incumbent would still be allowed to run for re-election.

I see his point, Jones commented. I see the frustration that people have when government doesn't listen to them.

But Jones also pointed out a byelection can cost about \$500,000. That's an awful lot of money, she observed, adding there need to be an aggressive look at the threshold.

There are some cases when less than 50 per cent of the electorate gets out to vote, meaning an issue like this could be decided by less than one-eighth of the eligible electors.

I think we need to figure out ways to get more people out to participate in the democratic process, she commented.

Jones also didn't give the bill much chance of getting very far, commenting that Wynne has already said she's not interested in seeing it pass.

I would say it's very unlikely, Jones said.

As far as local municipal politicians are concerned, there were varying opinions.

I would have no problem with it, but there has to be a trigger, observed Mayor Marolyn Morrison. It can't be 20 goofballs signing a piece of paper.

Morrison stressed a majority of the electorate would have to be in favour of the recall, and she also wondered who would pay for it all.

We're scrimping as it is, she commented. We're trying to cut everywhere we can.

Councillor Patti Foley said the expense involved would be a concern for her too.

While I support ideas that further democracy, I fully expect considering the cost and disruption of an election, she said.

Foley added she would want more clarification on what constitutes not performing.

Councillor Doug Beffort wondered if there was a point, at least in Caledon. He pointed out the Town has an ethics officer, so if some situation developed, council would be in its rights to make a complaint with recommendations.

I don't know if we have the legal right to remove that person, he added.

Councillor Richard Paterak said a mechanism is already in place.

It's called an election, he said.

Paterak did say there should be a recall procedure in cases involving mental stability or self-confessed anti-social behaviour, with options other than a byelection on the table. He added that's a good reason for having a deputy mayor.

Randy Hillier is taking a political opportunity to get a headline, Councillor Richard Whitehead remarked. I think the whole idea of a recall is ridiculous.

Whitehead maintained there is an active democracy in this country.

We're all accountable every day, he said. This just complicates a process that doesn't need to be complicated.

I think we're pretty well governed in this country, at all levels, particularly municipally, he added.

Councillor Rob Mezzapelli was of a somewhat different mind.

I think there needs to be a mechanism for that, and I think it needs to be in rare and extreme cases, he said.

Mezzapelli stressed such a mechanism must be used in such a way that it's not partisan or as part of a differing philosophy. It needs to be used sparingly; with discretion, he said.

I guess it all comes down to what's in the details, Councillor Nick deBoer remarked.

He added political representatives should realize when they have done something wrong. "You've got to exercise judgement," he said.

"I just don't know how it's going to work," was the reaction of Councillor Allan Thompson. "I just don't see it being practical." He pointed out the municipal level of government is also the closest to the public. "It would be political suicide to do anything stupid," he remarked.