

Talk of the Town by Mayor Allan Thompson ? Caledon will stand by our two-hatters

The two-hatter firefighter issue has raised its ugly head again.

Two-hatters are full-time professional firefighters who also volunteer their off-duty time answering calls in their home communities. They are some of the most experienced and loyal firefighters in our community.

Their unions ? the Ontario Professional Firefighter's Association (OPFFA) and the International Association of Firefighters (IAFF) ? are ordering two-hatters to hand in their pagers and stop fighting fires and responding to emergencies. The union's order flies in the face of public safety. It's wrong, and they should know better. It was only a year ago, after much public debate, that Ontario's Legislature passed Bill 109 to support two-hatters. It is incredible ? and appalling ? that these union leaders are not standing true to that Bill. And, for now, Ontario's Minister of Labour has yet to weigh in.

Ironically, the union leaders fight to ensure that firefighters can volunteer for anything, and can pursue any other career they want in their free time. They can pursue whatever they want, provided they aren't rescuing people or fighting fires.

I have to wonder if the union is protecting its own self-interest.

Our goal is community safety. And our taxpayers deserve cost-effectiveness.

Caledon's 22 full time suppression firefighters and about 250 volunteers work together to meet safety standards set by the Ontario Fire Marshal. In Caledon, we pay about \$20,000 to train each volunteer. That training often launches full-time careers in big GTA cities, but our two-hatters remember who gave them their start and they are loyal to us.

Caledon is not unique in that way. There are hundreds of two-hatters across Ontario and many of them started their careers as volunteers in their home towns. They serve big cities, like Hamilton and Ottawa, and they serve smaller communities that could not possibly afford to rely solely on full-time, salaried fire services.

The volunteer model is more affordable for smaller communities. It ensures that municipalities can fund other services that keep people safe, like policing, ambulance, winter road maintenance, water treatment, infrastructure investment and social services. The bottom line is that Ontario's municipalities must provide safe and affordable fire services for all communities.

Two-hatters deserve our thanks and our protection. They don't deserve this treatment from their unions. They have stood by their communities for years. Now they are standing by us despite threats from the union.

I know the community is with me when I promise that we will stand by them

