

Trick or Treat

by SHERALYN ROMAN

There's a good chance you are reading this column after the mayhem of Halloween is over but if not, first things first ? go answer your door and distribute some delicious delights! It's the one time of year when we can all be a kid again and indulge in a little dose of sugar-induced happiness. If, on the other hand, you are in fact reading this AFTER the Halloween shenanigans are over, never fear - there's lots of tricks, and maybe some treats to talk about, as long as our Provincial government is sitting that is! Whether there are tasty treats in store for Ontarians, or a whole boiling, black cauldron full of tricks is anyone's guess.

Under the category of ?trick,? there's the shiny, brand new Reducing Gridlock, Saving You Time Act! Also known by the more boring moniker, Bill 212. It promises to save you something like 30 minutes commuting time per day. That seems like a ?treat? but I question what's hidden inside the candy. Will it be dangerous, make you feel unwell, or in other ways be considered toxic? It's certainly possible because here come the ?tricks.? The act promises to ?speed up land acquisitions? (which might read more like circumventing processes put in place to protect landowners) and to implement 24/7 construction (because nothing says well-rested commuters like nearby homeowners being kept awake all night long by shuddering, loud machinery.) As for lost farmland, animal habitats and whitebelt lands, well let's just say it seems nothing is sacred. As Halloween traditions go, such disregard for the environment is akin to finding a rotten apple amidst your chips and chocolate.

If Mr. Ford were looking for a ?treat? to dish out over Halloween I have a suggestion for him, one he hinted at recently and that's far more enticing than a pillowcase full of candy - reducing or eliminating tolls on the #407. It appears Green Party Leader Mike Schreiner, who also had something to say on the subject, agrees. ?I'm glad the Premier is waking up to the reality that we need to end gridlock solutions today, not in 20 years,? he commented. Further, Schreiner said, ?Selling off Highway 407 was one of the worst deals in Ontario's history. The Ford government can start repairing the damage by subsidizing tolls for trucks on the 407, which would free up space for cars on the 401 at a fraction of what it would cost to build any new highway ? a solution the Ontario Greens were the first party to call for.?

This would certainly be an easy, and quick fix to the immediate problem of traffic gridlock and dare I say it, potentially one that might actually result in the promised ?saving 30 minutes of commuting time? now, not in the 10-15 years it will take to build the highway, rendering any savings essentially meaningless to most of us reading this column today.

In another example of ?Is this a trick, or a treat? we have the promised \$200 ?rebate,? coming soon to a bank account near you. Does anyone know why we are getting \$200 from the PC government? I spent some significant amount of time trying to find the ?reason.? Unlike previous years where there was at least the semblance of an excuse (think, license plate stickers) it appears there's no reason for this cash influx other than as a treat for citizens, being dangled prior to the possibility of an election early next year. Actually, wait, I take that back. I found something, from a speech to the Empire Club in Toronto (always a bastion for us common folks) earlier this month. Ford is quoted as saying, ?Put money into people's pockets and they'll go out and do something as simple as going out for dinner, maybe buying your kids sneakers or clothes, or maybe putting a little renovation on our house.? Okay, that last point has to be a joke right? A renovation? For \$200 bucks? I'm not even sure you can buy a couple of cans of paint for one room in a house for \$200 bucks these days. The idea is this \$200 ?gift? from the government will prompt us to spend money, jump-starting the economy. The reality is this is nothing but a hyped-up trick disguised as a treat and it's one that will cost Ontario an estimated \$3.2 billion dollars! Just think how many MRI's that might get us, or how many hospitals could eliminate ?hallway healthcare? with a portion of that money. Some ?treat? indeed.

In Halloween terms, a ?trick? is often something sneaky, absurd, gross or ? occasionally ? funny.

Tell me dear reader, under what category does building a tunnel under the 401 in order to alleviate gridlock land? Enquiring minds want to know. It's definitely absurd, and it would be funny, if not for the fear that Premier Ford is actually serious about this proposal and willing to spend money to study its feasibility. I'm not sure any of our local residents' lovingly created Halloween

haunts could scare me as much as the prospect of tunneling under the 401 does.

One final note, here's something that doesn't scare me. If you ARE reading this on Halloween night as the trick or treaters come and go, and a few of the local teens come knocking a little later this evening ? don't be a drag. Give out the last of your gooey goodies. Seriously folks, if the older kids knocking at your door have made at least a cursory effort to dress up, indulge their inner child. Where's the harm in that? Soon enough they'll be adults and dealing with the likes of politicians day in and day out. Give ?em a treat before they start experiencing tricks on the regular.