

The merits of red tape



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By Nate Smelle

One of the first official assignments I was given when I joined the team at Bancroft This Week as a full-time reporter in the winter of 2013 was to cover something called "Red Tape Awareness Week." Unaware at the time of what exactly this campaign was about, I drove north on Hwy 62 to sit in on a meeting with then MPP of Prince Edward-Hastings Todd Smith.

Before I could put my notebook down on the table, I was handed a press release by Smith's assistant and urged to step outside for a photo-op because they were on a tight schedule. Scanning the page quickly I could see that the press release I had been given was providing me with all the information needed to put together an article professing how terrible this so called red tape is for the economy.

Though I had never heard of Red Tape Awareness Week before, I certainly understood the definition of red tape and why Smith had made the trip north to spread the word about why he considered it to be a barrier to industry and economic development.

Slowing the momentum of the group as they headed for the door, I asked Smith if he had time to answer a few questions. Surprised that I was looking for more than the ready-made article his associate had given me, he sat back down and a discussion regarding the two sides of red tape ensued.

Asserting that there was an excessive amount of rules and regulations that industry needed to abide by in areas such as environmental protection and agriculture, Smith said he would like to see many of these laws eliminated. He gave the example of a developer who could not build a road into the site until after June 1 because of legislation protecting cold water creeks; and could not build after June 1 because there were species-at-risk found on his property "turtles" that were protected under the Endangered Species Act.

As he talked down these legal measures meant to protect the water, species-at-risk, and the environment I remembered a conversation I had that past summer with Dr. Sue Carstairs, a researcher and caregiver at the Kawartha Turtle Trauma Centre. During the interview, Carstairs explained to me the merits of the Endangered Species Act and the important role it, along with other similar legislation, plays in protecting the natural resources and the biodiversity that allow us to have a healthy economy. Carstairs went on to tell me about how each of these regulations have been carefully crafted after years of study. Referring to the Endangered Species Act, she said "Endangered species are called that for a good reason. It's because their populations are so low they are in danger of becoming extinct. Habitat loss is the greatest threat to endangered species and species-at-risk around the world, so if we don't have these measures in place we will lose them, and that would be a great shame. In the grand scheme of things we need to do more, not less."

These memories were provoked last week when I was bombarded by a wave of online campaigns and a pair of letters to the editor calling on the provincial government to stop something called Bill 66, aka Restoring Ontario's Competitiveness Act. Wanting to

learn more, I dug into the proposed legislation online and soon discovered that Smith was still attempting to peel away red tape by leading the charge with Bill 66 as Ontario's Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade.

Despite its intention to make it easier to do business in Ontario, if passed I believe Bill 66 will have the opposite effect on the economy. By altering the Planning Act to allow municipalities to create what the PCs have labelled an 'Open-for-business Planning Bylaw,' Bill 66 grants municipal governments the power to override important laws already in place to protect the public's health and quality of life.

Some of the essential laws rendered impotent by Bill 66 include: the Clean Water Act, Great Lakes Protection Act, Lake Simcoe Protection Act, Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Act, Ontario Planning Development Act, Places to Grow Act, Resource Recovery and Circular Economy Act, and the Toxics Reductions Act.

Without rules and regulations such as these, how can our government protect the water we need to live and the lives we need to do business?