

BROCK'S BANTER: The Beginning of a Beautiful Friendship

By Brock Weir

I'm sure I was in the minority, but last summer I waited with some degree of anticipation to see who Prime Minister Stephen Harper would announce to be the successor to Lieutenant-Governor David Onley.

Mr. Onley, a former broadcaster with CITY-TV, certainly brought a significant amount of visibility to the office of the Queen's representative in Ontario and, in turn, the causes he chose to champion.

Given his own history of battling polio as a child, Mr. Onley was a vocal and prominent advocate for those experiencing accessibility challenges throughout Ontario. That, however, was not his exclusive personal mandate; he made invaluable inroads in the fields of literacy and education, business advocacy, and any other tasks that happened to come his way ? and the more effective he proved in his role, the more those tasks seemed to pile up.

So, with little fanfare, at the end of June, Prime Minister Harper announced he would be succeeded by Elizabeth Dowdeswell. Leading up to the June 26 announcement, speculation gathered momentum. Possible candidates up for consideration included the facetious (Justin Bieber) to the infinitely more suitable, including Olivia Chow, if that whole mayoral bid didn't work out, and the then-recently-retired Finance Minister Jim Flaherty, before his untimely, sudden death scotched that idea.

Ms. Dowdeswell's appointment barely registered a blip on the public radar, leaving many of those who happened to catch the announcement to wonder, ?Elizabeth who??

Personally, I'm glad I was one of the people asking that question because the more I looked into just who Elizabeth Dowdeswell is, the more I was impressed.

To get you up to speed, Ms. Dowdeswell was born in Northern Ireland, before she came to Saskatchewan as a young girl. In Saskatchewan, she pursued her education, eventually serving as a deputy minister in the Saskatchewan government.

After a series of appointments ? including a stint with the Meteorological Service of Canada ? Ms. Dowdeswell spent a number of years serving in the United Nations, leading the United Nations Environmental Program (an interesting choice for Mr. Harper) and forging a number of vital links with organizations around the world, including the Commonwealth Secretariat which, as luck would have it, will serve her considerably well in her new capacity in Ontario.

Ms. Dowdeswell is a highly accomplished person with an impeccable resume and strong vision, but looking at these credentials I wasn't sure what one could expect from her as Lieutenant-Governor of Ontario. Earlier this month, however, I gained some insight attending a lunch in Toronto at which Ms. Dowdeswell, by now Her Honour the Lieutenant-Governor of Ontario, was a keynote speaker. I left feeling Ontario was in more than good hands.

?I often say that in any new job you should have at least six months so you can make all the mistakes and do all the learning before people start to call you to account!? she joked. ?As I have changed jobs and careers most of my life, every four or five years, I hope the mistakes never catch up to me. It is an honour and a privilege to be the 29th Lieutenant Governor of Ontario. I am very conscious that I have come to a venerable office and every day I am made aware of the significant contributions of my office and my predecessors who have made the province we know today.?

The Lieutenant-Governor was speaking to the crowd just a week before she was due to set off for London for her first audience with The Queen, her time in the British capital coinciding with the Queen's grand re-opening of Canada House in Trafalgar Square, which garnered considerable attention on this side of the pond.

Ahead of her departure, Ms. Dowdeswell spoke of the ?privilege? of representing the Queen, a woman in whom she recognized ?dignity, strength and commitment to duty.? She also spoke of the pride her own mother would feel in seeing her daughter representing the monarch in this vice regal capacity.

?The respect and admiration comes from years of watching a very strong and wise woman on the world stage of mostly men,? said Ms. Dowdeswell. ?It is not a hardship for me at all to look forward to pledging loyalty to her and the traditions of our collective heritage, and my attempt to protect the integrity of the Crown here in Ontario.?

Her vision for the office, as she made abundantly clear, is not limited strictly to protecting and promoting the integrity of the Crown in the province, but given her own background in public service, to listen to people in communities across Ontario to help define what she describes as ?Ontario's place in the world? and to challenge people to ?dare to think more boldly? on this place.

?During these first four months of my mandate, I have asked Ontarians for their ideas and their insights about Ontario's place in the world and they have generously responded,? she said. ?They have made many suggestions and from many stimulating conversations, a few specific priority themes will soon emerge. What is clear is they embrace the overarching theme of Ontario in

the world, not 'and' the world, but 'in' the world. They understand Ontario and the world are mirror images of each other. To succeed at home, we must contribute to the world and to contribute to the world we must be successful here at home.

The challenging issues of our time are ones that are going to require deep dialogue and systemic thinking. There is no magic formula. I also very much want to nurture the generosity of spirit, tolerance and commitment to social justice that already exists so we can live with dignity in just and sustainable communities here at home.?

So, in short, Ms. Dowdeswell has set an ambitious mandate for herself and also plans on building on Mr. Onley's mandate by turning things up to eleven.

As Mr. Onley prepared to leave office in September, he told The Auroran that he was particularly proud of his efforts to revitalize links between his office and the Queen's York Rangers, Aurora's regiment. Through his work, the office of the Lieutenant Governor is now inextricably linked with the Regiment and this new tradition will be formalized once again this week as Ms. Dowdeswell is formally invested as Colonel of the Regiment at a ceremony at Fort York.

In this capacity, Aurora can expect to forge strong links with the new Lieutenant-Governor and, given the new office holder, I believe this new relationship has infinite possibilities.