



St. Barts, the Caribbean island where Ontario Finance Minister Rod Phillips has been spending time on vacation.

Two sets of rules — one for Ontario's politicians and one for the public

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During a time of national emergency Ontarians need role models for civic

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minded behaviour. Members of the ruling Progressive Conservative party led by Premier Doug Ford should be setting these examples of appropriate behaviour during this pandemic, but they are not.

From the premier on down the clear message is there are two sets of rules — one for politicians and another for the general public. This needs to stop.

Since the declaration of a pandemic last March, Ontarians have been told to follow government mandates regarding personal hygiene, travel and gatherings for the good of all. Ford, MPP Sam Oosterhoff, Finance Minister Rod Phillips and MPP Randy Hillier have ignored these rules making it doubly hard for public health agencies to convince Ontarians that their mandates need to be followed.



KIRK WINTER, WRITER-AT-LARGE.

Last spring, during the first outbreak when we were told not to travel, the premier was spotted at his Muskoka cottage escorted by his OPP security detachment. The premier claimed that “he needed to check the pipes.” When confronted with his actions Ford apologized and said it wouldn’t happen again.

Then came Mother’s Day when families were told by public health not to gather in groups outside one’s bubble. The extended Ford clan gathered to celebrate the day with his mother. When confronted with the evidence once again the premier apologized and stated it wouldn’t happen again.

Cabinet assistant and MPP Sam Oosterhoff celebrated Thanksgiving 2020 with a traditional multi-generational family gathering when the rest of Ontarians were told to keep gatherings small.

Oosterhoff not only participated in the day, but then posted it to his Facebook page where it was roundly condemned by many, including the premier. Oosterhoff issued a public apology but faced no discipline by the party.

Phillips, the finance minister, is probably one of the three most powerful politicians in the province after Ford and Deputy Premier Christine Elliott. He has come in for public scrutiny now that it has been discovered that he and his wife left Ontario for a trip to the Caribbean beginning Dec. 13.

Premier Ford said in a public statement that

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he was “extremely disappointed that Phillips travelled... and that the trip comes at a time when Ontario residents have been asked to make sacrifices.”

“I have let the minister know that his decision to travel is completely unacceptable and that it will not be tolerated again – by him or any member of our cabinet or caucus,” Ford said.

Ford’s office added in a press release that “Premier Ford was not aware of the minister’s trip, nor did he or his office approve it. The premier learned of the trip after the minister was already out of the country.”

Phillip’s office continued to post over the holidays pre-staged photographs of the minister in his riding giving his voters every indication he was celebrating Christmas at home in Ajax.

He has defended his decision to travel because he left the country before the lockdown was announced. It was not before all Ontarians were urged to stay home and shelter in place for the holidays.

Phillips is on his way back from his truncated holiday, and most expect the finance minister will issue a public apology but face no more discipline from the Conservative Party.

The premier’s Christmas public relations woes were compounded by Conservative back bencher and pandemic doubter Randy Hillier posting a picture to Facebook flaunting that his extended family of 15 had gathered for the holidays with no social distancing or masks to be seen.

Hillier has called the pandemic “a manufactured crisis.” He has also cast doubt on the upcoming vaccine with nary a whisper from the premier.

At the height of the blitz in the Second World War, with London under daily attack, Prime Minister Winston Churchill floated the idea that the royal family would be safer in Canada, and proposed to the King and Queen that they consider re-location.

The response from all four royals was a resounding “no.” The king and queen wanted to be positive role models for the nation.

At this time of provincial emergency we should expect our elected leaders to walk the walk, not just talk the talk, but many from the premier on down are falling disastrously short in example and action.

Ontarians deserve so much better.

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