

FORD'S GREENBELT PROMISE ISN'T MEANINGFUL

During the provincial election campaign, Doug Ford was caught on video telling a room full of development supporters that he would hand over a "big chunk" of Ontario's Greenbelt to those same developers.

The public reaction was fast and furious, and Ford had to backtrack quickly, finally promising: "The people have spoken - we won't touch the Greenbelt."

Could it be that when he makes this sort of promise, he actually means the opposite? As in, we won't cancel the basic income pilot project, and then doing it? As in promising to invest in mental health services and then doing the opposite?

Given this track record, we shouldn't be surprised that Ford has apparently reversed again and is trying to let developers into the Greenbelt. He's using the back door this time. In an omnibus bill about cutting red tape, Bill 66 - Restoring Ontario's Competitiveness Act, the government plans to make it easier for municipalities to apply for exemptions to a number of protection measures under the guise of speeding up approvals for building offices and factories.

The measures in question include the Clean Water Act, the Great Lakes Protection Act and the Greenbelt Act. So if your municipality supports building a factory on Greenbelt land, it just has to apply to the province with assurances the development will create jobs and generate revenue if the protective measures impeding it can be set aside.

The government insists this doesn't amount to endangering the Greenbelt, that its promise to protect it is still in force. But if that's the case, why is the act specifically mentioned, along with other important environmental protection measures?

We're not just talking about the Greenbelt here, either. If a municipality wants to waive aspects of water or Great Lakes protection legislation, it will apply to the province to do so.

Don't worry, the government says. Any deviations from protective measures will still require provincial approval. That sort of "we've got your back" rhetoric might be comforting except that this is the same political party partially responsible for the Walkerton disaster. And they want to be trusted to make decisions that won't jeopardize public safety and the environment?

If there's a bright spot here, it is this: Municipalities have to make the application to start with. On one hand, this isn't comforting. Local governments are under the most financial pressure to keep taxes down and generate revenue. But on the other hand, they're more accessible to citizens and therefore likely to hear and act on grassroots pressure.

That means if you feel strongly about not allowing Ontario's 7,200-square-kilometre Greenbelt to become Swiss cheese with pockets of development, speak out. The same holds true with Great Lakes and ground-water protection. Let your local councillors know how you feel. Insist that any time exceptions are being considered meaningful public consultation and is part of the process.

Better yet, tell your local government to follow the example being set by Burlington, where new Mayor Marianne Meed Ward is already saying her council will stand up for the Greenbelt and not seek exemptions. That will send a clear message to the province, which might even listen.

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THE BATTLE FOR PARKING IS A HOLIDAY SEASON RITUAL

YOU NEED STRATEGY, SPEED AND DETERMINATION, WRITES ILOTT



STEPHEN ILOTT
Column

Nothing cattle prods the lustre out of Christmas shopping like the 40-minute scour for a parking spot beforehand. It has become a gladiatorial combat, game of chance more suited to type A gamers than the average Joe or Josephine.

Every male would sooner pour hot soup on his stomach than repeat this yearly ritual. But because we love our families, we buckle up and set out to the local big mall to do battle and snap up a prize or two to add to the holiday offerings. It's not that guys are cheap (we are) or that we're thoughtless (we're full of

thought). It's just that we think long and hard about buying someone something before we don't. We're kind that way. It's why we love gift cards. Nothing proclaims Merry Christmas like a nice piece of colourful plastic that says, "Here, buy yourself something nice."

We certainly don't see the necessity for the ritualistic pre-Christmas parking lot scramble. It's the outright tossing out the window of politesse that irks me to no end. Then you have to adopt the very tactics you despise in the competition.

With all spots taken, even the illegal ones, you resort to scanning for returning shoppers with their arms looped through bags, fishing for keys and trying to remember where they parked. You cruise close behind them surreptitiously like a hunter with a foliage hat and second guess where they may be going. When the shopper lifts their keys in a tired

salute you strain to hear the beep-beep of the car lock. More importantly, you wonder who else has spotted this fleeting opportunity. Sure enough other cars are sidling up nearby like greedy barracudas. Then, crestfallen, you see your shopper is only dropping off packages.

When you finally do snag a prime spot, a mile from the mall doors, it's usually because someone has pulled out right in front of you. You can't help but do a victory dance in that moment, something your spouse always finds distasteful.

Try to remain calm. It'll bring a little therapy to your home. Merry Christmas.

Stephen Ilott is a professional home organizer, lurching about in parking lots, and author of "The Domestic Archaeologist." For more information, visit www.decluttering.ca or contact him at info@decluttering.ca or 416-460-8098.

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newsroom@theifp.ca
IndependentAndFreePress
@IFP_11

WHO WE ARE

- Publisher**
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- Regional General Manager**
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CONTACT US

The Independent & Free Press
280 Guelph Street, Unit 77
Georgetown, ON L7G 4B1
Phone: 905-873-0301
Classifieds: 905-234-1016
Fax: 905-873-0398
Letters to the editor
All letters must be fewer than 200 words and include your name and telephone number for verification purposes. We reserve the right to edit, condense or reject letters.
Delivery
For all delivery inquiries, please e-mail lpolar@miltoncanadianchampion.com or call 905-234-1019.

