

# WILL WE WITHSTAND FORD'S NOTWITHSTANDING CLAUSE USE?

Regardless of where you live and how you identify politically, Premier Doug Ford's decision to ram through his plan to slash Toronto council from 47 wards to 25 via section 33 of Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms should trouble you.

While the so-called notwithstanding clause has been invoked by other provinces in the past — twice by Saskatchewan and numerous times by Quebec — it has never been used in Ontario. And that's not a bad thing given that the purpose of section 33 is to allow Parliament or a provincial government to override certain sections of the charter, specifically sections 2 (fundamental freedoms) and 7 through 15 (legal and equality rights) inclusively, to further its legislative agenda.

Since the ruling by Superior Court Justice Edward Belobaba that struck down Ford's council-cutting legislation, on the grounds it violated the rights to freedom of expression for election candidates and voters under section 2b of the charter, the matter has become the subject of some debate.

Former PC premier Bill Davis has come out against using the clause, as has former prime minister Brian Mulroney, who happens to be the father of Ford's attorney general, York-Simcoe MPP Caroline Mulroney. The list of supporters of Ford using the clause include former Saskatchewan premier Brad Wall and former B.C. premier Christy Clark.

That said, there's no disputing Ford has the legal right to use the notwithstanding clause, just as no one can argue the province doesn't have the authority to pass whatever laws it wants in relation to municipalities. Belobaba himself acknowledges this in his ruling, but he also takes considerable issue with the fact the changes were imposed during an election campaign already underway.

By now, we know the premier is fond of throwing the word democracy around, but between suspending charter rights to get his way and the scene that unfolded in the public gallery at Queen's Park last week, where some protesters were led out in handcuffs, our nascent PC government looks an awful lot like something else.

Ford also likes to imply he has carte blanche owing to the fact that 2.3 million voters supported his party, and yet this ignores the fact over 3.3 million people voted for somebody else.

Ultimately, what makes this whole episode so worrying is that Ford has indicated he would have no qualms with using the notwithstanding clause again. It begs the question: if he's willing to ignore some of our rights for the sake of a relatively trivial goal such as this, what's the next issue that will lead him to conclude the charter is nothing more than an impediment to his belligerent will?

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## CHAMPION TRACKS



Sims family photo

Julie Anne, Erica and Travis Sims take in the beauty that is Lake Louise, Alberta with a copy of their favourite community newspaper. Going away? Pack a copy of the Champion in your suitcase, snap a creative photo and email your Champion Tracks submission to [cohara@metroland.com](mailto:cohara@metroland.com). Please include everyone's name and destination information.

## LOOK, LISTEN, LEARN

### THERE ARE BASIC BUT ESSENTIAL STEPS TO PREVENT FIRE, SAYS CHIEF PRATT



DAVE PRATT  
Column

Fire Prevention Week was established to commemorate the Great Chicago Fire, the tragic and devastating fire in 1871 that killed more than 250 people, left 100,000 people homeless, destroyed more than 17,400 structures and burned more than 2,000 acres.

The fire erupted on Oct. 8, but continued into Oct. 9, 1871, which is when it did most of its damage.

Devastating fires such as this are not unique to the United States.

In July 1916, the Matheson Fire in Black River-Iroquois Falls, Ontario de-

stroyed 49 towns, killed more than 244 people and burned more than 200,000 hectares of land. This tragedy also led to the creation of legislation now called the Forest Fires Prevention Act.

Most recently, the 2016 Fort McMurray wildfire forced more than 85,000 residents from their homes, representing the largest wildfire evacuation in Alberta and also the costliest disaster in Canadian history - to the tune of \$4 billion.

Fire Prevention Week is Oct. 7 to 13 and this year's theme is "Look. Listen. Learn. Be aware. Fire can happen anywhere."

History can teach us to better understand fire and how to reduce the likelihood of one starting. I want to remind you of three basic but essential steps to prevent fire and how to escape safely in the event of one:

1. "Look" for places fire could start. Take a good look around your home.

Identify potential fire hazards and take care of them.

2. "Listen" for the sound of the smoke alarm. You could have only minutes to escape safely once the smoke alarm sounds. Go to your outside meeting place, which should be a safe distance from the home and where everyone should know to meet.

3. "Learn" two ways out of every room and make sure all doors and windows leading outside open easily and are free of clutter.

The Milton Fire Department invites residents to attend our open house on Saturday, Oct. 13 from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. to learn about fire prevention and how our firefighters help the Town of Milton. There will also be live demonstrations, apparatus displays and station tours for the whole family.

*Dave Pratt is chief of the Milton Fire Department.*

MILTON  
The Canadian Champion.

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