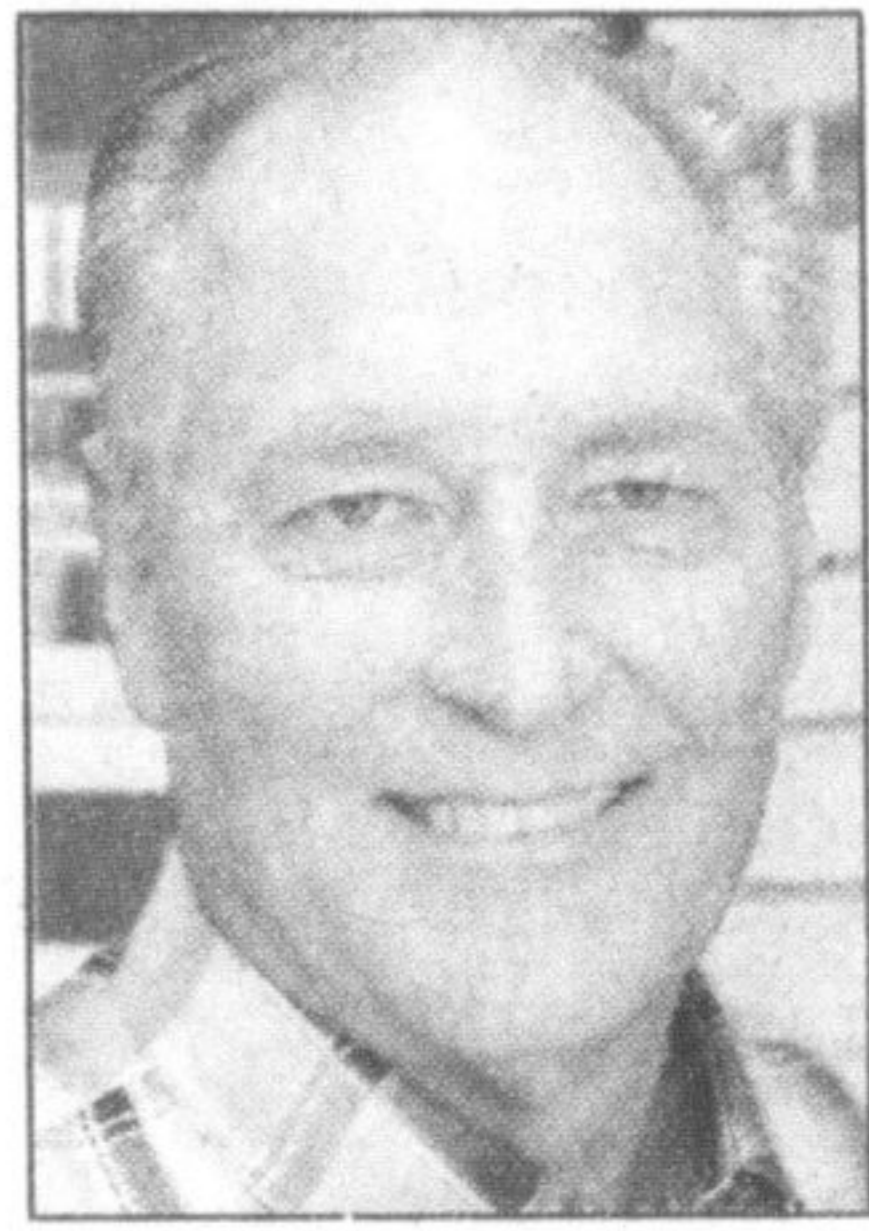


Chudleigh tossed out of legislature after accusation

By Tim Foran
CANADIAN CHAMPION STAFF

He admits it wasn't his finest hour, but Halton MPP Ted Chudleigh was unrepentant Wednesday after being tossed from the legislature for accusing Ontario Energy and Infrastructure Minister George Smitherman of not telling the truth to Halton residents about why a new hospital in Oakville has been delayed.



Ted Chudleigh

Chudleigh said it was his first time being thrown out of Question Period in his 14 years in provincial politics, but the Conservative felt his actions "got us (Oakville residents) closer to a hospital."

Amy Tang, spokesperson for Smitherman, declined to comment on Chudleigh's specific charges, but said, "Our commitment to the hospital remains unchanged."

Wednesday's heated exchange began after Chudleigh asked Smitherman why the government hasn't issued a request for qualification (RFQ), a preliminary step in the construction of a new hospital for Oakville.

Dissatisfied with Smitherman's answers, Chudleigh yelled out, "Tell us the truth." The Speaker asked Chudleigh to withdraw his comment, but the angered MPP refused three times before being escorted from the room.

Ironically, Chudleigh's removal came a short time after the Speaker had already admonished other MPPs for displaying poor behaviour — constantly interrupting each other — in front of students observing the proceedings.

Following the incident, Chudleigh complained that Smitherman hasn't been sufficiently forthcoming about the reasons why the opening of a new hospital at Dundas Street and Third Line in Oakville has been pushed back to 2014/2015 from the original opening date of 2013.

Infrastructure Ontario, which organizes the construction of large projects on behalf of other provincial departments, advised Halton Healthcare Services earlier this year the delay was due to a lack of construction capacity.

Smitherman expanded on that advisory in his response to Chudleigh Wednesday when he said his ministry decided on the delay after a "sophisticated conversation" with the few large contractors capable of building complex projects such as hospitals.

Chudleigh disputes this. He said he has spoken to eight companies with the capacity to build hospitals

in Ontario "and everyone of them said, 'We can build it right now.'"

He demanded the Province issue an RFQ, which allows Infrastructure Ontario to identify companies qualified to participate in a later competitive bidding process to build the hospital.

In an interview last week, Liberal Oakville MPP Kevin Flynn said an RFQ doesn't make much sense right now if the Province knows there aren't enough companies available to have a competitive bidding process.

"Just going through the motions doesn't serve anybody," Flynn said. "If you're only going to get one bid, (the charge) is going to be off the charts."

Flynn said he's pushing for the Province to start the grading and servicing of the 50-acre hospital site in preparation for future construction.

An analyst on the construction industry in Ontario said the current economic climate means manpower shortages previously faced by large construction companies might no longer be the case.

"It's a good time for government to be launching these (public) projects," said Alex Carrick, chief economist for Reed Construction Data-CanaData.

Carrick said private sector construction projects are slowing down, which is freeing up workers, and at least some of them would be qualified to work on hospitals.

"Any kind of high-rise office building isn't that much different than a hospital," Carrick said.

Though no RFQ has been issued for the construction of the hospital, the search for a facilities management services company for the new hospital is now in the second phase — the 'request for proposal' process. The bidding process is designed to find a respondent to operate the future hospital's energy-efficient systems.

According to the RFP, the new Oakville-Trafalgar Memorial Hospital, which will replace the existing one on Reynolds Street, will be about 1.2 million square feet and have 427 in-patient beds. This may be expanded in stages to 704 beds by 2023/2024.

The existing hospital is operating at or near maximum capacity, Halton Healthcare Services representatives said in a letter in October.

The overcrowding means some patients who are admitted may have to remain in the emergency room for a day or more before being moved to a regular acute care unit bed, the company's ombudsman added recently.

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