

OPINION

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Parties not foolish enough to run on religious platform

Re: Federal Conservatives forgetting Christian roots, letter, June 11.

Pastor Gord Alton, I'm sure speaks for a few when he outlines his belief that the federal Conservative party should be opposing our coalition Liberal government on the basis of "Christian" beliefs, not budgetary prudence.

When did the Conservative party of Canada become the Christian Conservative party as he describes it? I submit it didn't, nor will it.

The facts are no political party in this country will ever be foolish enough to run on a platform of Christian beliefs or Muslim, or Judaic or any other religion doctrine for that matter. Thoughtful Canadians in large numbers are not interested in having a government centred on any religious belief.

We are fortunately a tolerant nation, not bent toward a single religion, but hopefully respectful of all. I will refrain from the temptation of listing a few of the world's countless conflicts over the centuries, sparked by the clashing armour of religious belief.

The pastor goes on to ask the Conservative party to look again at its Christian roots. What Christian roots?

The pastor may be older than me, but he somehow misses the point that Conservative prime ministers Campbell, Mulroney, Clark, Diefenbaker, Bennett, Meighen, Borden, et al were not elected because of their religious platform.

Why not ask all political parties while you are at it, pastor, to simply do the right things for our society, hold them accountable to the platform they ran on and leave religion to the inside of places of worship.

While Harper, Martin, Layton and the separatist simply want to get elected, none of the feds are foolish enough however, to intentionally declare they are a Christian party, particularly the Tories, or announce any other any other religious affiliation for that matter.

I'll probably vote Tory in the next federal election, not for religious reasons you can be sure, but rather to see the sight and hear the sound of a bunch of Liberal snouts finally being dislodged from the trough.

WILLIAM TRAINOR
UNIONVILLE



Unnecessary disruption for our most vulnerable

Les English is an engineer with an MBA and a law degree, the former president of a mining safety company. He and his late wife, Margaret, enjoyed their Schomberg home for 30 years.

When we had breakfast together the other day in the back yard of his son's lovely Aurora home, Les was wearing a bib.

Les is 88 years old, suffers from dementia, is incontinent and can't walk since a "significant" stroke last year. Son Paul, who has been looking after his dad at home for the last six years, wishes Elinor Caplan would come for a visit, instead of a newspaper columnist.

He would tell her he's still "furious at the absurdity" of the way CHATS (Community Home Assistance to Seniors) lost its contract at the end of last year with the CCAC (Community Care Access Centre) of York Region.

"By far the biggest disruption in our lives has been the re-assigning of the contract," says Paul. "Put yourself in his place: it takes a long time for him to establish relationships. He can't comprehend what's going on, doesn't follow instruc-

tions, well unless he feels safe. Suddenly someone new, much younger and female, shows up to bathe and clothe him."

There are nearly 17,000 people like Les in York Region, receiving provincially funded home care through the CCAC. In his case, a worker comes for an hour every morning and evening to attend to his needs. Paul estimates since the change in contract, the shifts are covered by as many as a dozen different individuals each month.

Paul English isn't critical of the new workers.

"My heart goes out to these people — they really care," he says.

But he's certainly critical of the process that was "so upsetting for his father.

"People he'd become friends with suddenly disappeared. It has taken literally months for him to become comfortable again."

The controversy in York Region was duplicated in many areas of the province, leading the Ministry of Health to commission former cabinet minister Ms Caplan to undertake a review. Exhaustive in its detail, it sets out the complexity and inconsistency of the current



Bruce Annan

structure and makes 70 recommendations — at a price of \$100 million.

Both Deborah Egan, CHATS executive director, and Bill Innes, executive director of York CCAC, are generally quite pleased with the Caplan report and eager to see it implemented.

Ms Egan says Ms Caplan identified the right priorities: quality of service, avoiding client disruption, workforce stability and a recognition of the "added value of the not-for-profit sector and other community organizations".

Mr. Innes says Ms Caplan also met his priorities: sustaining suppliers longer and improving quality while still controlling pricing.

So the woman who lost the contract and the man who took it away are now in jolly agreement? Well, not quite.

"If (Ms Caplan's) recommendations had been followed, we would not have lost our contract," says Ms Egan.

"The results would not have been different" if CCAC had waited for the report, says Mr. Innes. "They're still only recommendations — who knows how long it will take?"

CHATS is still very active, with 100 staff and 750 volunteers serving 3,000 clients. But the lost CCAC contract resulted in 300 layoffs and reduced CHATS from a \$13 million to a \$5-million operation. It lost the contract despite an 85.7-per-cent score in the bidding process, which it had successfully won twice before.

Some other CCACs decided last year not to follow the tendering process mandated by the previous Conservative government, but instead await the outcome of the Liberals' review. They simply extended existing contracts in the interim.

Mr. Innes says that wasn't an

option because York had followed the rules and begun the process before the Caplan review was announced. It would have been unfair to the companies involved; he would have had to renegotiate existing contracts and could have ended up in a similar position eventually.

And the CCAC is saving taxpayers \$2 million with its new, mostly for-profit suppliers. (Money that, Ms Egan assumes, comes out of workers' paycheques since CHATS followed the more expensive employment practices recommended in the Caplan report.)

None of which mollifies Paul English, as he clears away his father's breakfast dishes.

"CCAC was charged with managing the process," he says. "Any business or government agency has templates for assessing people's quality of work and cost-effectiveness, why couldn't CCAC do the same?"

Bruce Annan is a York Region writer and consultant. Bruce.annan@gmail.com

LETTERS POLICY

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