

# The Chronicle Journal

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## Early vote may tempt Trudeau

SPRING is in the air, bringing with it a desire to open the windows, let in the sunlight and clean house. Speaking of sweeping out, might a federal election be in the offing?

A year ago, a spring vote might have seemed unlikely. But as impatience with the Liberal government's refusal to clear the air over the SNC-Lavalin affair appears to grow by the day, the prospect of heading to the polls well ahead of the fixed date of Oct. 21 has moved beyond mere poppycock.

The cost of a federal election is not chump change — in 2015, the tab came to \$443 million. Cost alone might have been a deterrent if the Grits contemplated dropping the writ two years before their mandate is due to expire. But surely it won't matter now if we pay the bill in May or in the fall. Food for thought: the 2015 cost per registered voter rang in at just \$17. The price of democracy was cheaper than a movie ticket and a bucket of popcorn.

The Grits, who have had a very rough ride since January, may well conclude that a spring vote is their only chance to remain in government. The bloom is clearly off Justin Trudeau's rose. And there is little reason to believe that voters who currently regard him as a puppet of Liberal strategist Gerald Butts, or a "fake feminist" who reportedly yelled at one of his own female MPs, will suddenly see him as a wise, sagacious leader by the time the leaves have gone from red to brown.

Not only that: the fallout from SNC-Lavalin may only get worse. Last week, while seeming to conduct its own damage control, the Quebec engineering and construction giant emphasized it never said that 9,000 jobs would be lost if it faced a full prosecution on bribery charges — a dodgy claim that has been raised repeatedly by Trudeau, a Quebec MP.

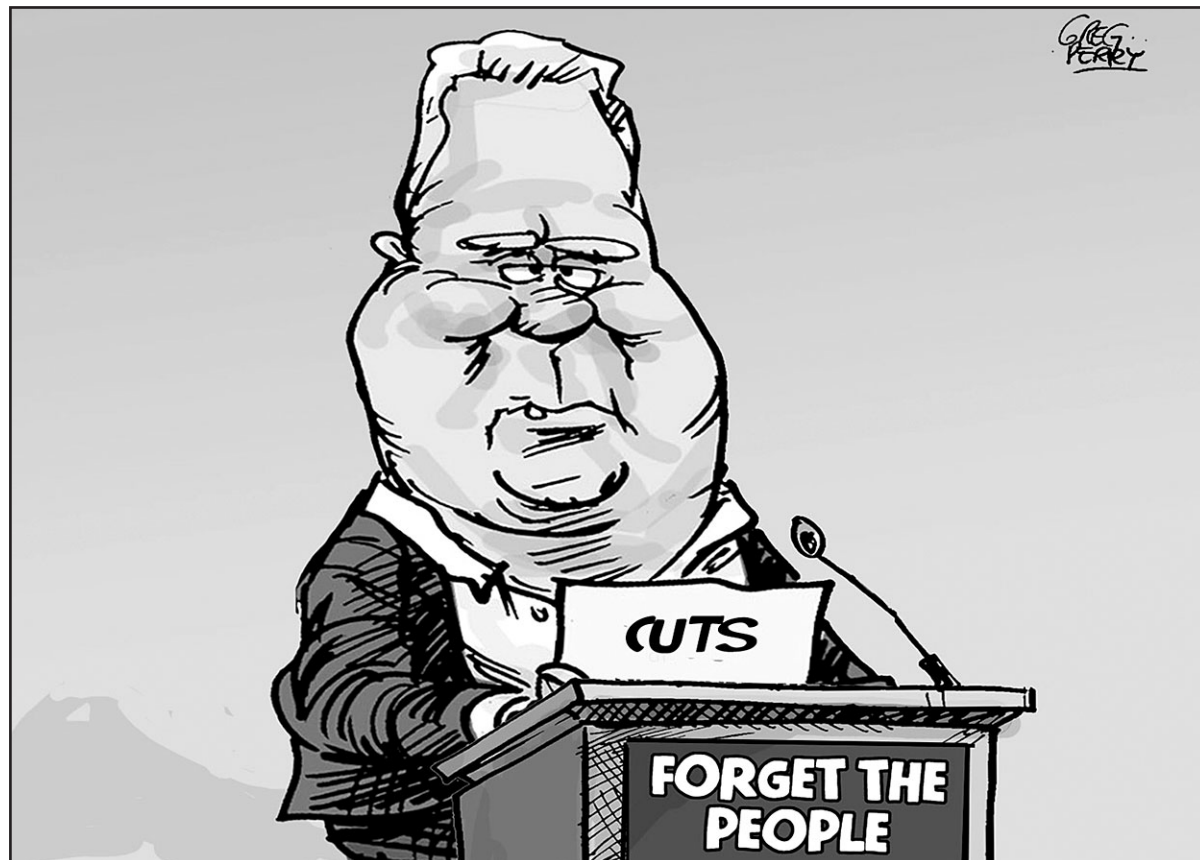
If the Liberals refuse to come clean, then voters could very well vent their frustration with this intransigence by booting them out of office before the leaves are on the trees.

A spring election would also be a sooner-than-later referendum on the Liberal's willingness — as evidenced last week by Finance Minister Bill Morneau's latest budget — to plunge the country further into the red with no end in sight, just as former provincial Liberal leader Kathleen Wynne proposed to do in Ontario. We all know how that movie turned out: Wynne's party was reduced to a nub.

And yet, the federal Liberal's competition in the leadership department is hardly formidable. Conservative Leader Andrew Scheer, who still seems like a rookie, has never been accused of being a great orator. And NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh, who earlier this year occasionally appeared seriously out to lunch on the international relations file, has only recently landed a seat in the House of Commons. Singh remains largely unknown outside the Toronto area and his Burnaby, B.C. riding. He's not going to be a significant factor in the next election, whether the vote is held in spring or fall.

Though his brand has been tarnished, Trudeau remains a good campaigner. And, while it shouldn't be a factor, but inevitably will be, he remains one of the handsomest men on the planet. Despite all the pressure he must be under, and with a young family, to boot, Trudeau always appears remarkably youthful and fit.

The star power isn't completely gone from him yet. Will it keep twinkling right through to the end of October? That's a chance the Liberals might not want to take.



## Premier proves tone deaf, thin skinned

BY MARTIN REGG COHN

DOUG Ford has dodged a bullet, and the OPP is making a speedy recovery. But this premier has not emerged unscathed from the friendly fire he inflicted on the Ontario Provincial Police, nor the collateral damage visited upon his own office.

Blinded by hubris, enamoured of his personal pals, intoxicated by his power to lavish largesse on cronies, Ford put himself — and all of us — in harm's way. For the OPP is the province's police force, not the premier's personal plaything.

An unprecedented report on his conduct, by the legislature's integrity commissioner, delivers a mixed verdict:

No formal wrongdoing — no personal enrichment, no direct conflict of interest, no technical violations of the rules — in the attempt to install longtime family friend Ron Taverner as OPP commissioner.

But no shortage of red flags about a "flawed" and "troubling" patronage process gone awry — and a government losing its way.

The 101-page summary of David Wake's three-month investigation is a sobering indictment of people at the locus of power twisting themselves out of shape to please and appease the premier — anticipating his personal preferences, rather than safeguarding the public interest. Yes, it is a cautionary tale, but no, the premier is in no mood to learn lessons.

Ford boasted, unabashedly, about his "complete — I repeat a complete — vindication." He also warned all who oppose him that "we will not let disruptive partisan tactics . . . distract us."

Disruptive? As Ontario's disrupter-in-chief, the premier understands the power of disruption, distraction and destruction.

Perhaps, after Taverner's humiliating withdrawal from the OPP appointment after months of public protests, Ford still believes he did



PROVINCIAL AFFAIRS

the right thing. And would do it all over again.

Possibly, after the embarrassing resignation of Steve Orsini as head of Ontario's non-partisan public service, over Ford's refusal to delay the Taverner appointment, the premier would by now be having second thoughts. Not insisting that he was wronged.

But at a time when a wiser politician would be cutting his losses, this premier remained unrepentant Wednesday, insisting, "We didn't do anything wrong."

Notwithstanding the integrity commissioner's narrative, the premier has his own self-serving story and he's sticking to it.

The timeline is more complicated. It began as a classic patronage play — offering a cushy \$270,000 job at the government-owned Ontario Cannabis Store to his favourite neighbourhood cop.

It culminated with Taverner turning down the munificent marijuana job and holding out instead for the more powerful post of OPP chief. Except that he didn't have the required qualifications, never having risen to the rank of deputy chief at Toronto police service.

When word got out that the prerequisites had been diluted, allowing Taverner to apply after all, he was damaged goods. The integrity commissioner takes the government at its word that this was an innocent downgrading of the required credentials, the better to select a top-grade chief.

But the public timeline, and the private correspondence, leave little doubt that the fix was in from the

get-go — starting with the gift-wrapped cannabis offering. Orsini, fully cognizant that he served at the pleasure of the premier, made sure to keep Ford's chief of staff, Dean French, in the loop, sending frequent updates on the selection process.

As Ford's deputy minister, Orsini urged cabinet to suspend the appointment.

When Ford held firm, Orsini quit. Ultimately, Taverner also bowed out. And the premier lost out.

This month, the government announced a new OPP commissioner, former York Region deputy chief Thomas Carrique. By all accounts he is a good fit for the job, even if the selection process was quick and opaque. A better outcome, but two hasty hirings don't make this flawed process any better than the last one. If nothing else, that's the takeaway from the integrity commissioner's report:

"For a position of this importance and given the sensitivity of the relationship between the government and the police," we need to do better next time, it concludes.

At a time when the OPP are so often called upon to investigate politicians — Ford threatened to sic the police on the NDP Wednesday, the NDP called for an investigation of the premier Monday, and the last Liberal government was investigated by the anti-rackets squad for years — the commissioner must be above reproach, beyond suspicion and free from personal entanglements.

For all of Ford's protests that Taverner was the right man at the right time, he has displayed a tin ear — and a thin skin — all along. The premier lost the plot on the police.

This time, the public protests were too loud to ignore. Next time, will he get his way?

*Martin Regg Cohn is a columnist for The Toronto Star. Email him at mcohn@thestar.ca or find @reggcohn to follow him on Twitter.*

## Food sovereignty vital to create First Nations food security

BY CHARLES Z. LEVKOE AND JESSICA MCLAUGHLIN

IN CANADA, one in eight households struggle with food insecurity; that — is, they do not have access to enough nutritious and culturally appropriate food — and these numbers are far greater among First Nations communities. Why is a population that managed to feed itself prior to European contact among the most food insecure in the country today?

The answer to this question is complicated but we do know that it is not for lack of food. Instead we need to consider that food insecurity is much more than a food problem, but an indicator of material deprivation and the result of many factors beyond the direct control of individuals. It demands a serious look at the ongoing impact of settler-colonialism on changing diets, the forced removal of Indigenous people from their lands and waters and the limiting of self-determination and decision-making power over their lives and food systems.

Solutions that address the root of food insecurity must go beyond charity and support Indigenous people to take back control of their food systems. Faced with an array of challenges imposed through settler-colonialism, Indigenous people have struggled to reclaim their cultures and autonomy. The concept of Indigenous food sovereignty refers to the vision and practice of a food system that provides healthy, culturally appropriate and environmentally sustainable food while ensuring that communities (not governments or businesses) are able to make decisions about how their food systems should work.

Indigenous food sovereignty understands that food is sacred and part of a web of relationships with the natural world that sustains cul-



ONE CITY, MANY VOICES

**Thunder Bay's Anti-Racism and Respect Committee produces this monthly column to promote greater understanding of race relations in Northwestern Ontario.**

ture and community. Through food sovereignty, Indigenous people and communities around the world are reclaiming their cultures and autonomy, asserting and practicing their inherent rights while preserving, protecting and integrating traditional food practices into everyday life.

To these ends, Understanding Our Food Systems has been a collaborative project based in Northwestern Ontario with a goal to enhance and support Indigenous food sovereignty. The project was co-ordinated by the Indigenous Food Circle, a collaborative group of Indigenous-led and Indigenous-serving organizations in the Thunder Bay region that aims to support and promote Indigenous perspectives and experiences around food. Using food as a tool for reconciliation and resurgence, the Indigenous Food Circle creates the space to reclaim and weave Indigenous knowledges and experiences into food systems.

Together with the Thunder Bay District Health Unit and Lakehead University, the Understanding Our Food Systems project worked with 14 road-accessible First Nations in Northwestern Ontario to develop and implement community food sov-



PHOTOS SUPPLIED BY THUNDER BAY'S ANTI-RACISM AND RESPECT COMMITTEE

**Chef Rich Francis, right, prepares Lake Nipigon trout on an open fire for participants at the Understanding Our Food Systems gathering held in January at the Regional Food Distribution Association in Thunder Bay.**

ereignty visions and identify ways to improve food security. This involved community visits, a regional scan of available resources and the development of short-, medium- and long-term activities determined and led by each of the First Nations communities.

From Jan. 22 to 24, a regional gathering was held in Thunder Bay that included an interactive workshop to prepare for implementation of the action plans and community food sovereignty visions. The gathering provided communities and supporting partners with a forum to learn and work together.

Shelly Livingston, from the Bigitigong Mno-zhi-yaawgamig/Pic River First Nation Health Centre and participant in the project, noted: "Our biggest discovery in this work,

is how food insecurity and food sovereignty are at the core of many of our biggest challenges."

She explained: "We are still very much separated from our traditional food systems, and what we have managed to maintain are still over-regulated in the colonial system. Our people were cultivators and we had intimate relationships with our food. It was filled with spirit and social systems. It was more than a means of survival; it was cyclical and interdependent."

Through the Understanding Our Food project, the participants took leadership in their communities, strengthened networks with other First Nations and allies across the region, and implemented short-term actions to improve their food systems. While there were many suc-



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**Jessica McLaughlin, co-ordinator of the Indigenous Food Circle, splits wood to start a cooking fire during the Understanding Our Food Systems gathering.**

cesses to report, the most important learning from the project was that food security for First Nations requires Indigenous food sovereignty. This work will take generations of continued hard work and meaningful partnerships based on trust and respect

*Charles Z. Levkoe is the Canada Research Chair in sustainable food systems and an associate professor in health sciences at Lakehead University. Jessica McLaughlin is Anishinaabe from Nakina, Ont. and a member of the Long Lake No. 58 First Nation whose work focuses on Indigenous food sovereignty and self-determination. The views and opinions expressed in this column are those of the authors.*