

'Red tape' professions protect our province

Legislation that undercuts skilled, knowledge economy employment is short-sighted

PAUL RACHER

This may sound strange coming from an old "lefty" archaeologist, but I think Doug Ford and I could be friends.

Seriously. Although we might disagree on politics, I'm pretty sure we would be on the same page about the important stuff in life: family, music, movies, the Leafs and the Jays. Probably not the Argos (ew), but I think we could get past it. We also share similar flaws. I'm certain, for instance, that both of us spend far too much time looking at our smartphones.

I know this for a fact because I texted him this spring with concerns about Bill 5 (the Protect Ontario by Unleashing our Economy Act), and he responded to me immediately. Minutes later, he had Graham McGregor — the minister responsible for archaeology — call me personally to set up a meeting. I defy anyone reading this to tell me they've ever had that level of service from their government before.

I am not a billionaire. I'm nobody. I run a small business that conducts archaeological studies in advance of development projects. We make sure that projects proceed without disturbing graves or archaeological sites.

There are a lot of professions in the development industry that, at first glance, might seem like "red tape." In truth, most of them became part of the process for very good reasons.

The baby boom that followed the Second World War sparked a construction rush to support Ontario's growing population. In the frenzy to build, countless significant heritage buildings were demolished to make room for new construction. Thousands of Indigenous archaeological sites were bulldozed away. Homes were constructed atop settler cemeteries and Indigenous burial sites. Forests were cut down. Houses were built on floodplains. Creeks were filled in. Marshes were drained. Important natural habitats were destroyed. Prime farmland was lost. Sewage and contaminated effluent were dumped into watersheds. It was a mess, and it wasn't sustainable.

In fits and starts from the 1940s onward, Ontario governments and municipalities of all political stripes worked hard to build a planning and development process that would avoid most of these egregious outcomes. Balancing protections against the need for development didn't always work to the satisfaction of all, but it is no coincidence that the slogan "Keep it beautiful" was added to Ontario licence plates in 1973.

The archaeological industry I work in is part of that. It employs an estimated 1,200 people and generates revenues of around \$120 million a year. You can bet that, if tariffs were threatening the existence of a factory that size, my almost-friend Doug Ford would be visiting it to let them know he was prepared to fight for them. And I have no doubt that he would. He's that kind of guy.

But he, like many of us on the older, "maler and paler" end of the spectrum, grew up at a time when the good jobs for regular folks were found on factory floors and in assembly lines. As we have transitioned from an industrial to a knowledge economy, many of them have moved offshore or have been replaced by automation. They're not coming back — at least not in the numbers that we saw in the postwar boom. The world has changed. But it doesn't mean there aren't good jobs to be had.

The archaeology business is a very small part of the wider development sector. Across Ontario, there are thousands of environmental and heritage planners, hydrogeologists, geotechnical engineers, noise and air quality specialists, ecologists and others who contribute (literally) uncounted millions to the provincial economy. Protecting what makes this province great is good work. The use of instruments like Bill 23 and Bill 5 to boost construction jobs by undercutting skilled, knowledge economy employment is short-sighted.

If you rounded all of us up, I would wager that we vastly outnumber the workers on any assembly line in the province. Doug, my friend — we could use a hand too. Text me and we'll talk.

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R.J. JOHNSTON/TORONTO STAR FILE PHOTO

Archaeologist Peter Popkin works at a site in downtown Toronto in 2017. There are thousands of specialists who — derided as "red tape" — contribute millions to the economy, Paul Racher writes.



THOMAS FROESE

From left, baseball legends Ted Williams, Jackie Robinson and Babe Ruth appear ghostlike in the front display glass at Mickey's Place, a vintage baseball store in Cooperstown, N.Y.

Just swing for the fences



THOMAS FROESE
OPINION

If you ever find yourself on the other side of the border without knowing exactly what to do about this, my advice is to get to Cooperstown, in upstate New York, the birthplace of baseball and where you can hang around with baseball ghosts.

Hockey, of course, has its ghosts skating around, like in Nova Scotia's town of Windsor, seen by some as hockey's place of birth. I just discovered it's a twin community of Cooperstown.

These ghosts aren't the sort that clank around at night. They're more helpful voices that can travel across time, say, Remembrance Day — "This way, boys!"

Or they can help make sense of the Blue Jays' recent World Series loss, that strange Game 7, extra-innings loss on All Saints' Day that left us speechless.

One day, while in front of a vintage baseball shop on Main Street in Cooperstown, I saw what looked like the ghosts of Ted Williams, Jackie Robinson and Babe Ruth. Near the Baseball Hall of Fame and Doubleday Field, baseball's official birthplace, there they were in the storefront glass, reflected against buildings and trees like ghosts close enough to touch.

Now keep in mind that ghosts may or may not always wear shoes.

I find something both rebellious

and holy in this, running around without shoes. So, naturally, baseball's best-known ghost is Shoeless Joe Jackson.

This is largely thanks to the novel "Shoeless Joe" by W.P. Kinsella, a Canadian writer interested in Canadian culture and Indigenous issues and, of course, baseball.

Maybe you've seen "Field of Dreams," with Kevin Costner, the film based on Kinsella's remarkable novel.

Shoeless Joe Jackson, a major league superstar who played from 1908 to 1920, had a lifetime batting average that's still among the highest ever.

He's also known because of the so-called "Black Sox scandal" of the 1919 World Series.

Eight Chicago White Sox players, including Jackson, were banned from pro baseball for allegedly throwing the series for gambler's money. It's an interesting charge considering Jackson's 12 hits set a World Series record that lasted 45 years. Now, in 2025, he's been exonerated.

But the book "Shoeless Joe," a novel of magical realism, is about something else — namely, the fictional character Ray. He hears ghostlike voices, then makes one crazy move after another, including ploughing under his farm's corn so he can build a baseball diamond for ... well, he's not sure. It's where we get the phrase, "If you build it, they will come."

The story is about life as much as baseball. It has something to say about getting over our human fears.

It speaks to the nature of fatherhood. It's also about ritual and freedom, faith and community and togetherness, being connected in these very earthly and very heavenly ways.

When a young Shoeless Joe eventually appears at the farm ball diamond, he asks, "Is this heaven?" Ray replies, "No. It's Iowa."

What comes from it all is a certain peace and a message that says something like this: "You have one life. Just one. So listen carefully to it. Don't worry what others might do or think. Just swing for the fences. No, really. Live your life like the created work of art that you are."

This, it seems to me, is what these ghosts are saying. So earlier this year, when Father's Day rolled around, I said to my wife and kids, "All I want is to sit together and watch 'Field of Dreams.'" And we did.

This is why the Blue Jays' playoff run was about more than losing. Or winning. Not that winning in sports isn't important. It is. It's worthy work. Who doesn't enjoy championships?

But sometimes when you lose something precious — even, eventually, your life — you gain other things never imagined.

So love the game, sure. And love each other. And pass the popcorn.

Shoeless Joe would say something like this if he was watching. And who's to say he wasn't?

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Poillievre should note defections have derailed the Tories before



CRAIG WALLACE
OPINION

On Tuesday, Nova Scotia MP Chris d'Entremont announced he was leaving the Conservative Party caucus and would be joining the governing Liberals.

The news rocked Ottawa as with the defection Prime Minister Mark Carney's government is now only two seats from a majority.

d'Entremont said he was tired of Pierre Poillievre's negativity, telling the Toronto Star, "It's just looking at leadership styles and whether we are doing the right thing for Canada or we're doing the right thing for ourselves. And I would rather be on the side of Canadians."

d'Entremont may not be the last Tory to defect either.

It has been reported in various media sites that the Liberals have approached several Conservatives about either crossing the floor and joining the Liberals or sitting as independents.

For Poillievre, the loss of d'Entremont and allegations that there may be more of his MPs who could leave his caucus is a very ominous sign. And there is historical precedent for this that Poillievre should be very aware of.

Let's return to the House of Commons in early 2020.

Then prime minister Jean Chrétien headed a Liberal majority government.

The opposition was splintered between the official opposition Canadian Alliance, headed by Stockwell Day; the Bloc Québécois, led by Gilles Duceppe; the New Democrats, whose leader was Alexa McDonough, and the Progressive Conservatives led by Joe Clark.

The Canadian Alliance caucus was restless. They were concerned over Day's dismal performance as party leader in the 2000 federal election.

The party had increased its seat total to 66 from 58, but failed to make a breakthrough in Eastern Canada.

Members began questioning Day's overall leadership.

By the spring of 2001, a number of Alliance MPs led by party stalwarts Deborah Grey and Chuck Strahl demanded Day step down as leader. He refused and, within weeks, all Alliance MPs had either quit the caucus or had been expelled.

By the end of the summer, after Day issued a "pardon," a few of the "rebels" returned to the fold.

Seven of them, however, including Grey and Strahl, formed their own independent caucus and created a coalition of sorts with Clark's Progressive Conservatives.

Many Canadians asked themselves, "if Stockwell Day can't lead a caucus of less than 70, how can we

trust him to lead our country?"

That indeed would spell the end of Day's leadership.

He called for a leadership convention for April 2002, where he was defeated by Stephen Harper.

The following year, the Canadian Alliance and Progressive Conservatives would unite and form the Conservative Party of Canada.

Today, there is reported unrest in the Conservative caucus over Poillievre's terrible election campaign leadership.

The party blew a 20-plus-point lead that they held late in 2024 and Poillievre lost his own seat. He failed to pivot from a campaign based on bashing former prime minister Justin Trudeau's legacy, to facing the reality of Donald Trump's threats to Canada.

His platform, if one could call it that, had the intellectual depth of a finger bowl.

The only way Poillievre got back into the House of Commons was when an Alberta Conservative MP gave up his own seat so Poillievre could run in it. And since then, Poillievre has not changed his approach or style one iota.

Stockwell Day didn't learn his lesson when he began to lose his caucus in 2001 and he lost his leadership.

If Poillievre isn't careful, he will follow in his footsteps.

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