

Doug Ford's 'Gravy Plane' was a monumental mistake

By Michael Taube

Spending millions on a private plane is a slap in the face during an affordability crisis Ontario Premier Doug Ford, like most political leaders, has made his share of mistakes in office. He deserves credit for apologizing for quite a few of them. Most politicians would hesitate to follow his lead.

Alas, Ford's most recent error in judgment was a monumental mistake. His government's poor decision turned into a political calamity in only a couple of days' time. It left a bad taste in the mouths of many Ontarians and some longtime party supporters.

Oh gravy plane, we hardly knew ye.

I am, of course, referring to the Ontario government's purchase of a \$28.9 million pre-owned private jet for Ford's use when travelling across the province. CBC News reported that the Bombardier Challenger 650 was "purchased directly" from Bombardier and had previously been owned by an unnamed individual based in South America. The deal had been in the works for several months.

The private jet would have allowed for "more certain, flexible, secure and confidential travel," according to a statement from the Premier's Office to CBC News. "As part of the job of being Premier of Ontario, there is extensive travel within Ontario, a province twice the landmass of Texas. This is in addition to travel across Canada for Council of the Federation and First Ministers' Meetings, which have increased in frequency, as well as travel to the United States to help make the case against President Trump's tariffs."

That's all well and good, but it doesn't make up for the fact that this was a moronic decision by the Ontario government.

Canada is in the midst of an affordability crisis. Prices have escalated by 30 to 50 percent on most products. Grocery bills have escalated, along with the cost of gas, electricity, construction materials and more. Individuals and families are struggling to make ends meet. Yet, someone in the Premier's Office-or the Premier himself-thought it was a good idea to buy a private jet and spend nearly \$30 million in taxpayer dollars. A few people foolishly defended this extravagant purchase at first, but were drowned out in short order on social media and elsewhere. That's no surprise. The decision was tone-deaf on so many levels, it's not even funny.

In particular, Ontario NDP leader Marit Stiles's clever April 17 post on X set the tone of this discussion. "Ford ran on a promise to stop the gravy train. Then he spent \$30M of your money on his gravy plane. He should be flying economy like the rest of us."

I don't know if Stiles was the one who conjured up "gravy plane." If she did, then kudos to her. If not, it was a fine juxtaposition with the equally clever "gravy train," a popular phrase largely associated with the Premier's late brother, former Toronto mayor Rob Ford, more than 15 years ago. The major difference is that derailing a gravy train is based on fiscal prudence and responsible spending of taxpayer dollars, whereas riding a gravy plane has an opposite effect.

Ford's interest and association with Conservative principles have largely disintegrated during this time in office. For someone who grew up in a fiscally conservative household, has touted Conservative policies in the past and currently leads the Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario, he doesn't seem terribly bothered by this about-face.

It should also be mentioned that Ford has a fear of flying. That's unfortunate, and it happens to many people. Then again, the white-knuckled Premier needs to overcome his fear of flying the friendly skies on his own and not use public funds as a means of conquering it. Within a couple of days, it became clear that Ford and the Ontario PCs had lost this battle. The Premier apologized and reversed course. "Despite the best of intentions, I have heard and agree that now is not the right time for the expense of a government plane. The province is working with Bombardier and other partners to sell the plane as quickly as possible."

Speaking to reporters on Monday, Ford said he "heard loud and clear because I'm the only person in the world who gives out a cell number. And I heard loud and clear from the people that this was not the time to purchase a plane." He also said, "I'm the premier that listens to the people. If they don't like something, I'm not too shy to change my mind and say okay, this isn't the time to move on."

That's fine, but it never should have happened to begin with. Not only did Ford and his government look weak when they announced the controversial purchase of the private jet, but they now look even weaker for having capitulated so quickly and starting the process to sell it.

Will this controversy bring down Ford and his government? Of course not.

At the same time, it's going to be one of those rare moments when the Premier's public apology doesn't resonate with supporters and critics alike.



Karmageddon

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CENTRAL EXCLUSIVE

When Procedure Becomes a Weapon at Clarington Council

In theory, municipal democracy runs on rules.

In practice, it runs on whether those rules are applied consistently — or selectively.

And lately, at the Municipality of Clarington Council, the line between the two is starting to blur.

The Illusion of Order

You'll often hear references to Robert's Rules of Order — the gold standard of meeting procedure.

It sounds reassuring. Structured. Fair. Democratic. But here's the truth most residents don't know: Clarington doesn't actually run on Robert's Rules. It runs on its own Procedural By-law, under the authority of the Municipal Act, 2001.

Robert's Rules are, at best, a guideline of last resort — not a free pass for improvisation. So when they're invoked loosely, or selectively, something else is happening.

The Referral Motion Loophole Let's talk about referral motions — the procedural equivalent of "send it back for more work."

On paper, these motions are simple:

- Where is the matter going? - When is it coming back?

That's it.

They are not supposed to be: - A second debate on the issue - A political soapbox

- A workaround to revisit arguments already made

But at Clarington Council, something different is unfolding. When "Where and When" Becomes "Whatever You Want"

Repeatedly, we're seeing: - Members speaking at length on the substance of issues - Arguments being re-litigated during referral motions - The Chair allowing broad commentary far beyond procedural scope And here's where it gets uncomfortable: That latitude is not always applied equally.

Some are cut off.

Others are given the floor.

Same motion. Different rules.

Why This Matters (More Than You Think)

This isn't about technicalities. It's about control of the meeting.

Because when procedural rules are bent:

- Debate can be extended or suppressed at will

- Outcomes can be influenced without formal votes

- Certain voices can be amplified — others muted

That's not governance.

That's procedural engineering. The Real Rule Being Broken

Let's be clear — this isn't about misquoting Robert's Rules.

It's about something far more serious:

Inconsistent application of the Procedural By-law And under Ontario law, that raises real questions: - Are decisions being made fairly? - Is the process transparent?

- Is the Chair exercising discretion — or bias?

Because once rules become flexible depending on who is speaking...

They stop being rules at all. The Consequence No One Talks About Here's the part they won't say out loud:

When procedure is applied inconsistently, it creates:

- A record of procedural unfairness - Grounds for formal complaints - And in extreme cases, exposure to legal challenge

That's not political theatre. That's administrative risk. So What Happens Next?

There are only two paths forward:

1. Apply the rules consistently - Limit referral debate to process - Enforce scope equally

2. Continue down the current path - And accept that the legitimacy of decisions will be questioned Because once the public starts to see the pattern... They don't unsee it.

The Bottom Line Procedure is supposed to protect democracy. Not be used to shape it.

And at Clarington Council, the question is no longer whether the rules exist.

It's whether they're being used as a framework — or as a tool.

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