

Back in the 1930's a particular adage gained notoriety, even though it was around long before then. The adage, which readers will no doubt have heard many times is, ***“There's no such thing as a free lunch.”*** No one really knows the origin, but my guess is it became popular through the radio show hosted by actor, humorist and journalist Will Rogers. Rogers' dry sense of humour entertained millions with such comments as, “When I die, my epitaph, or whatever you call those signs on gravestones, is going to read: ‘I joked about every prominent man of my time, but I never met a man I didnt [*sic*] like.’ I am so proud of that, I can hardly wait to die so it can be carved.”

When it comes to dealing with people, I truly do believe it is best to be honest, open and transparent. Voters have the right to expect that from their elected representatives. Mean what you say and say what you mean.

I mention the above in light of the recent comments from Doug Ford and Minister Lisa Thompson regarding the ‘disappearing license plate’ issue. In recent weeks, Ontarians learned of the troublesome safety issue which is that at night and under certain visibility conditions, the newly designed license double-blue plates were unreadable by police and were not clear enough for photo plate recognition technology system to discern.

At first Minister Lisa Thompson and the Ministry of Consumer and Government Services denied there were any problems with the plates. Then, just a day later, they flip flopped and agreed there were some “minor” issues that were being looked into. To me, there is no shame in admitting that you are not aware of something and that you will look into it. However; when one follows a pattern of denial and then backtracking, as the Conservatives do, generally speaking, one tends to have problems maintaining real credibility for long.

For weeks the Ford government knowingly issued tens of thousands of defective double-blue license plates, and announced they would continue issuing the faulty plates until the matter was straightened out by the manufacturer.

This never should have happened. It was clear from the beginning that the new blue plates were unsafe, but the Ford Conservatives chose to put public safety at risk, and their response to criticism has been denial and finger pointing.

Days ago, Minister Thompson stood in the Legislature and assured tax payers that the problem had been addressed and that the manufacturer was assuming full and total responsibility for the mess. And when pressed on how much this colossal failure would cost Ontario's tax payers, the minister announced it wouldn't cost a penny. When media considered this response, logic lead to cause doubt in their minds. They asked Doug Ford to confirm the claim. Ford's reaction, in tone, word and body language was extremely telling. Let's just say I'm glad I wasn't part of the media scrum that was on the receiving end of his public rebuke for daring to ask such a question. Clearly Doug Ford believes that the best defence is an offence – or better yet, an indignant defence with a lecture for good measure.

Ontarians across the province couldn't help but take notice of the kneejerk response. After all, we all know that, *‘there's no such thing as a free lunch.’*

For this reason, Andrea Horwath has formally requested Ontario's Auditor General review all costs associated with the production and replacement of the Ford government's defective license plates, and to review the non-disclosure agreement signed between the Ford government and manufacturer, 3M.

Replacing the new, faulty license plates with even newer ones will, as Andrea notes in her letter, “certainly have costs associated,” including those related to materials, shipping and redesign. So why is Doug Ford and his government attempting to hide those costs with the non-disclosure agreement?

Andrea said, “The plate-gate boondoggle has substantial cost implications, and people simply don't trust Doug Ford's claims that Ontarians won't be on the hook for any of those costs. You don't sign a non-disclosure agreement if you're telling the whole truth and nothing but the truth.” After all, isn't the purpose of a non-disclosure agreement to ensure that information remains private?

Personally speaking, as a boy growing up I learned that at our house it was better to fess up when we messed up, and then set about to making things right. And hopefully, I've passed on this same lesson to my sons.

New Democrats are not dreamers or pie in the sky idealists. The truth is, people, corporations and even governments don't always get things right. But we believe in transparency and accountability. Be upfront and let the people see for themselves what happened. Hiding the truth behind a veil only incubates suspicion and mistrust.

It's time Ontarians had a government whose focus was getting things done for them. We have a vision for a fairer, more equal Ontario. It's a vision that champions our public services and delivers for families. It's time to build a new partnership with our municipalities, business, Indigenous communities and all people of Ontario. Partnerships built on respect and mutual support, where every decision is in the best interest of Ontarians

As always, please feel free to contact my office about these issues, or any other provincial matters. You can reach my constituency office by email at mmantha-co@ndp.on.ca or by phone at 705-461-9710 or Toll free 1-800-831-1899.

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