

**“The New Kids On The Block:
A Look at Rookie Members of Provincial Parliament”**

Sabrina Hoque
Intern, 2007-2008
Ontario Legislature Internship Programme
(OLIP)

Room 1303, Whitney Block,
99 Wellesley Street West,
Queen's Park,
Toronto, Ontario
M7A 1A2

(w) 416 325 0040

(c) 416 948 7227

sabrina.olip@gmail.com

www.olip.ontla.on.ca

Paper delivered at the Annual Meeting of the Canadian Political Science Association,
11:00 a.m., Thursday, 5 June 2008, Vancouver, British Columbia

INTERVIEWING PROCESS

For the most part, arranging interviews with the various Members of the Ontario Provincial Parliament (and those having direct relationships with the MPPs) were effortless and unproblematic. My initial strategy involved me personally approaching the interviewees, introducing myself as a Legislative Intern (a title most had become familiarized with over the course of the past several months) and naming the member with whom I was working with at the moment. I found that through this brief introduction, I was able to establish a sense of comfortable, easy conversation between the interviewee and myself. I would explain my intention of writing a research paper to be submitted as part of the internship program in Vancouver, specifically on the topic of Rookie MPPs. All who I approached for interviews expressed great interest and majority were excited to be a contributing factor for the development of this paper. Arranging an interview (either with them directly, or through their schedulers) proved to be the most challenging aspect of my research process, mainly due to hectic, unpredictable schedules and time constraints. However, I was able to squeeze into their calendar for at least a half-hour; for most interviews, they were extended to approximately 45 – 60 minutes. If interviewees were unable to accommodate a face-to-face dialogue session, responses to my interview questions were emailed in. All questions [attached as Appendices] were emailed in advance so as to prepare them. Interviews took place in the form of an informal dialogue exchange, structured around the questions I provided as a guiding outline. My interview requests were unanswered by a few rookie MPP offices, and I was directly refused an interview by only one office, a rookie MPP sworn into Cabinet post-October 2007 election. The reason for rejection provided by staff members included that the said member was “apprehensive in responding to the questions” and “was too busy to respond”.

Other ways I obtained information about the personal experiences of rookie MPPs was through watching Steve Paikin’s October 30, 2007 ‘Rookie MPPs: What can those on their way in learn from those on their way out?’ show, ‘The Agenda’, which featured Dianne Cunningham (former PC MPP for London North Centre), Peter Shurman (PC MPP Thornhill), Paul Ferreira (former NDP MPP York South-Weston), and Paul Miller (NDP MPP Hamilton East-Stoney Creek). I also obtained rookie MPP perspectives from reading the transcript of the March 22, 2008 Focus Ontario show, “Resumption of the Ontario Legislature,” with guests Liberal MPP Sophia Aggelonitis (Hamilton Mountain), NDP MPP France Gelinis (Nickel Belt), and PC MPP Bob Bailey (Sarnia-Lambton).

Analysis of the information collected from my interviews entailed reading my hand-written notes, by which I was able to identify common themes, trends and patterns, as well as distinct differences in the various perspectives of the interviewees. Through these interviews, I am able to highlight in my research paper the initial sentiments felt directly by rookie MPPs while adjusting to their Queen’s Park responsibilities, the commonalities and differences of balancing priorities among members, and the perspectives of others related to Queen’s Park with regards to the challenges faced by rookie MPPs.

DATA AND METHODS:

After the October 2007 provincial elections, the Legislative Assembly of Ontario prepared to enter into its 39th Parliamentary session with 19 rookie MPPs: 12 with the Liberal Party, 5 in the Progressive Conservative Party, and 2 in the New Democratic Party. My research is based on

representation from 11 of these ‘rookie’ MPPs, as well as two of the three rookie MPPs who were voted in the February 2007 by-elections. To add some diversity on the topic of my paper focusing on rookie MPPs, I have also interviewed individuals who have had frequent interactions, discussions and relationships with both rookie and veteran MPPs over several parliamentary sessions. These include former MPPs, Legislative staff members, newspaper columnists, and a lobbyist of a government relations firm. In total, I conducted 18 interviews, either in person, through phone or via email correspondence.

ROOKIE MPPs:

- Sophia Aggelonitis: Liberal, Hamilton Mountain, Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Small Business and Entrepreneurship
- Laura Albanese: Liberal, York South-Weston, Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Culture
- Michael Chan: Liberal, Markham, Minister of Citizenship and Immigration – won in February 2007 by-election
- Helena Jaczek: Liberal, Oak Ridges-Markham, Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Culture
- Amrit Mangat: Liberal, Mississauga-Brampton South, Parliamentary Assistant to Minister Responsible for Seniors
- Yasir Naqvi: Liberal, Ottawa Centre, Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services
- Charles Sousa: Liberal, Mississauga South, Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Government and Consumer Services
- Paul Miller: New Democratic Party, Hamilton East-Stoney Creek, Critic Portfolios: Workplace Safety and Insurance Board of Ontario; Tourism, Recreation and Sport; Economic Development and Trade
- Sylvia Jones: Progressive Conservative, Dufferin-Caledon, Critic for Community and Social Services
- Peter Shurman: Progressive Conservative, Thornhill, Critic Portfolios: Citizenship and Immigration; Francophone Affairs
- France Gelinac: New Democratic Party, Nickel Belt, Critic Portfolios: Northern Development and Mines, Health Promotion, Disabilities, Health and Long-Term Care, Seniors' Issues
- Bob Bailey: Progressive Conservative Party, Sarnia, Labour Critic

OTHER PERSPECTIVES:

- Paul Ferreira: Former MPP of York South-Weston (February – October 2007)
New Democratic Party, Current Chief of Staff to NDP Leader, Howard Hampton
- Elizabeth Witmer: Veteran - MPP (1990 – Present)
Progressive Conservative, Kitchener-Waterloo, Opposition House Leader,
Critic to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care
- Frances Lankin: Veteran - Former MPP of Beaches-Woodbine (1990 - 2001)
New Democratic Party
- Carol Price: Political Staffer in the office of the Chief Government Whip of the Liberal Party
- Chris Benedetti: Lobbyist, Government Relations firm, the Sussex Strategy Group
- Jim Coyle: Provincial Affairs Columnist, Toronto Star

Introduction

According to the Canadian Oxford Dictionary, a “rookie” is defined as a ‘novice’ – plain and simple. A ‘novice’, in turn, is thus defined as ‘a beginner; an inexperienced person.’ Through the analysis of observations and interactions from local media and of my own, and from qualitative interviews with various individuals at Queen’s Park, one point I can confirm is that no Member of Provincial Parliament (MPP) is ‘inexperienced’ to the extent of not knowing what their role at the legislature is. When it comes to representing the concerns of their constituents, working on policy for the betterment of the public good, and effecting change to make Ontario a better place to live in, all MPPs – both ‘rookie’ and veteran – are experienced and are well aware of what their role and responsibilities are. For the purposes of this paper, I will employ the term ‘rookie’ solely to refer to first-time MPPs who were newly elected to Queen’s Park in the provincial elections of 2007 (including by-elections). While academics have produced a plethora of research on rookie Members of Parliament (MPs) going to work in Ottawa’s ‘Hill,’ I found that much has not been written focusing on the rookie politicians at the provincial level. This paper thereby focuses particularly on rookie MPPs in an attempt to reveal the sentiments felt at the provincial level, especially when faced with the challenge of effecting change, identifying patterns that emerge through my qualitative research.

‘Out with the old, in with the new’ – an idiom that best describes election results, illustrating not only the establishment of the new mandates and priorities of the incoming government, but also the reinforcement of set agendas pre-election period. With every election come new opportunities, new electoral expectations, and newly elected officials ready to serve their constituents. While veteran MPPs bring to politics their experience and willingness to uphold the tradition of Queen’s Park, rookie MPPs bring a level of freshness. When commenting about his new cabinet ministers, which includes two rookie MPPs, Premier Dalton McGuinty of the Liberal Party said they serve to “energize, invigorate and keep [other MPPs] vital and active and committed and enthusiastic.” This paper thereby seeks to comparatively examine the impact and efficacy of such ‘newness’ on good governance at the provincial level. Conducting my research primarily through qualitative interviews with rookie and veteran MPPs, legislative staff members, and others directly involved with the political process in Queen’s Park, I aim to provide anecdotal analysis of the rookie MPPs and their influence on affecting change in the time they have spent thus far at Queen’s Park.

‘Hangin’ Tough’: The Role of an ‘Effective’ MPP

“New MPPs campaign on prefab platforms, often published as promise books; campaigns are almost entirely focused on the leader; local candidates frequently rise or fall on the strength of the leaders’ popularity and campaigning acumen. As a result, they arrive at Queen’s Park indebted to the leader, constrained by pre-packaged policy and scripted by the message. It is a phenomenon of the last quarter-century or so that has diminished their role and status hugely.”¹

When receiving this quote from Toronto Star columnist, Jim Coyle, in response to my question on the challenges rookie MPPs are faced with upon entering Queen’s Park for the first

¹ Written answer to interview questions by author from Toronto Star columnist, Jim Coyle, Queen’s Park, 2008.

time, it made me wonder how effective an MPP could actually be with a pre-packaged script laid out for them, following the party mandate and messaging, and if this was the case – how is the unique effectiveness of an individual MPP then determined? David Pond states that the role of the backbench MPP is “to faithfully espouse their parties’ policies in the Legislature and on the hustings; [to be] ombudsmen for their constituents; and to familiarize themselves with the details of complex areas of policy.”² When asked what defined an ‘effective’ MPP and whether years of experience in politics played a defining role, interviewees responded with varying answers, although mainly with a theme of an MPP’s connectivity to their constituents.

Keeping in line with the third point of Pond’s description on the role of an MPP, Yasir Naqvi, rookie MPP for Ottawa Centre, stated that an ‘effective MPP’ is one who is a representation of the needs of their local community; one who listens, engages in outreach programs, is able to prioritize issues and immediately start working on them. In essence, an ‘effective’ MPP is one who “does not get sucked into the life of Queen’s Park.”³ While admitting that as a rookie MPP, she is still learning the determinants of an ‘effective’ MPP, Laura Albanese, rookie MPP of York South-Weston, was in agreement with her fellow liberal caucus member, stating that an ‘effective MPP’ was “one who holds the needs of the community close at heart.”⁴ In addition to staying connected to the constituents, Charles Sousa, rookie MPP of Mississauga-South, maintains it is also very important to be respectful, sincere, and empathetic of everyone with whom you have dealings; including constituents and staff members. Following along the same lines of placing importance on MPP personalities and behaviour, MPP of Oak Ridges-Markham, Helena Jaczek, identified several MPPs whom she felt were ‘effective’ role models. These include: Donna Cansfield (Minister of Natural Resources), Leona Drombowski (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs), Carol Mitchell (MPP Huron-Bruce), Maria Van Bommel (MPP Lambton--Kent—Middlesex), and Jim Watson (Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing). Common characteristics she identified were “their ability to stay calm, provide solid facts and maintain a decent pitch of voice. They thank honourable members for questions, are respectful when answering questions in a calm manner. They are also very concerned with their community and communicate with their constituents.”⁵

Highlighting political experience as a significant factor, Paul Miller, rookie MPP (with background in municipal politics) of Hamilton East-Stoney Creek, defined an ‘effective MPP’ as one who “never forgets where he came from and the people who put him there. One who knows the community inside out. [An ‘effective MPP’] is one who goes back into his community and faces his peers after his tenure at Queen’s Park.”⁶ As an experienced veteran herself, serving in her 5th parliamentary session, Elizabeth Witmer MPP of Kitchener-Waterloo, described an ‘effective MPP’ as “one who is happy with what they are doing. One must work hard every day, maintain balance in life, be knowledgeable of issues of the day, and be responsive to the people they are serving. Serving the constituents should be considered first and foremost.”⁷ This response clearly indicates that the significance of constituency concerns does not decline with the number of years spent at Queen’s Park. As Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, Michael Chan MPP of Markham, stated, “Years of experience in politics does not automatically translate

² Pond, David, quoted in Hepburn, N. “Backbench MPPs as Agents of Local Concerns.” p. 2, Intern CPSA Paper 2005.

³ Interview with Yasir Naqvi, MPP Ottawa Centre, Queen’s Park, Toronto, 2008.

⁴ Interview with Laura Albanese, MPP York South-Weston, Queen’s Park, Toronto, 2008.

⁵ Interview with Helena Jaczek, MPP Oak Ridges-Markham, Queen’s Park, Toronto, 2008.

⁶ Interview with Paul Miller, MPP Hamilton East-Stoney Creek, Queen’s Park, Toronto, 2008.

⁷ Interview with Elizabeth Witmer, MPP Kitchener-Waterloo, Queen’s Park, Toronto, 2008.

to seniority in caucus, although they are valued. There is something to be said for someone who has dedicated so many years to this kind of public service. However, we are all colleagues and do our utmost to listen to one another- as we all offer different perspectives.”⁸ As someone who had been a rookie MPP for a period of eight months, Paul Ferreira, former MPP of York South-Weston said, “An effective MPP is one who can draw attention to an issue and effect change with that legislation. Someone who can assist constituents get through red tape and bureaucracy, who stands up and gets noticed, bringing important issues to the attention of the media and government of the day.”⁹

It was interesting to note, that while MPPs associated ‘effectiveness’ primarily with the connectedness established primarily with constituents, those from outside the legislature (i.e. local media, lobbyists, and stakeholders) having direct relationships with members held a slightly varied perspective on what principally defined an ‘effective MPP’. Chris Benedetti has a strong presence at Queen’s Park as a senior lobbyist of a government relations firm, The Sussex Strategy Group, briefing members on matters of significant importance to the interests of their clients, often finding ways to assess how those issues/concerns affect the interests of the MPPs, and building an atmosphere of reciprocity. He stated that, “an effective MPP is one who debates often in the Legislature; is engaged with local and broader stakeholders; and is involved in aiming to address/resolve issues/make changes by tabling and getting engaged in introducing new legislation. Years of experience in politics absolutely define seniority levels in caucus, which then in turn affects how effective an MPP can be.”¹⁰ In response to this same interview question, Jim Coyle, Toronto Star Public Affairs columnist, wrote:

“Most are solid citizens who arrive ready to work, eager to make a difference, aware of the responsibility and rarely, if ever, with the notion of feathering their nests. They need to be many things - part idealist, masochist, bulldog, part cynic, part charmer. They need to be generalists who can pass as fluent on any issue at a moment's notice. They need to treat every constituent as if his or her problem were their biggest worry of the day. They need to know when to bark and when to purr to get files moved through the system and win attention for their concerns. In the riding, they need to be visible and available. They need to grow thick skins, big ears, keen eyes, acute antenna, while avoiding the slightest impropriety under almost constant scrutiny. Many leave saying they wouldn't have missed the experience for the world. But that they wouldn't repeat it on a bet. Frankly, you couldn't pay me enough.”¹¹

Coyle is not alone in his opinions of the challenging, time-pressured lifestyle of all MPPs. A surprising aspect of the MPP lifestyle that majority of the MPPs interviewed admitted to, was the lack of control on their own lives and schedules. Fortunately for the rookie MPPs, there is an orientation process for all rookie MPPs at the Ontario Legislature, assisting them to ease into their new demanding lifestyles and responsibilities. While a number of the rookie MPPs who either had previous political experience or exposure through their partisan involvement were

⁸ Interview with Hon. Michael Chan, MPP Markham, Queen’s Park, Toronto, 2008.

⁹ Interview with Paul Ferreira, Former MPP York South-Weston, Queen’s Park, Toronto, 2008

¹⁰ Interview with Chris Benedetti, Lobbyist – Government Relations Firm, Sussex Strategy Group, Toronto, 2008.

¹¹ Jim Coyle, Queen’s Park, 2008.

familiar with the legislative process and felt no surprises of the legislative process, all rookie MPPs interviewed shared the same overwhelming feeling of being ‘thrown immediately into the deep-end’. Rookie MPP backbenchers, like Laura Albanese (MPP for York South-Weston) and Jaczek, have valued the initial learning period which has allowed them to become more familiar and comfortable with the institutional structure, their ministry responsibilities, and what it takes to be an ‘effective MPP’. Unlike them, a couple of rookie Liberal MPPs did not have quite the same advantage, as they were almost immediately sworn into cabinet with ministry responsibilities. According to Jaczek, it is a huge mistake to put a rookie MPP into cabinet especially with the position’s steep learning curve, believing that at least a year of exposure is necessary in order to establish a full comfort and confidence. On this point, Coyle said:

“The vast majority could benefit from a period learning about the legislature, its history and procedures. Some, by dint of native intelligence, private-sector experience or ability to learn fast and think on their feet, can handle a ministry right out of the gate. But there is really no experience quite like government. It is almost impossible to appreciate its frustrations and understand its workings until you're there.”¹²

Coyle’s opinion is shared by many of those whom I spoke with who either had a direct relationship with the legislature, were former MPPs or cabinet ministers themselves, even some of the rookie MPP backbenchers themselves. The varied responses to this question demonstrate that the personal traits and characteristics, ambition and inspiration, and the relationships established as a result of constituent-connectedness all play significant factors in the success of an ‘effective MPP’ – and this is recognized by everyone, whether veteran or rookie within the political arena. Whether the initial ambitions and inspirations of these MPPs inevitably change over the course of their time in politics is a question that is addressed next.

‘Step by Step’: Political Inspirations, Ambitions, and the Art of Balancing Priorities

In his book titled, Mr. Smith Goes to Ottawa, noted academic scholar, David C. Docherty, writes about the sentiments felt by first time politicians heading to Ottawa to become Members of Parliament working on Capital Hill:

“Most rookie MPs arrive in Ottawa hoping to affect change, thinking that their participation in the political progress can make a difference. After a few months, they realize that optimism and good ideas are not sufficient. Cabinet, caucus, party discipline, and strong hierarchical leadership interview with their plans to unfailingly represent their constituents and supporters. Yet, like Mr. Smith, they find other things about their job as a politician that brings them pleasure, such as the satisfaction of providing one-on-one constituency help to people in their riding or procuring government services for the entire constituency.”¹³

¹² Jim Coyle, Queen’s Park, 2008.

¹³ Docherty, David C. Mr. Smith Goes to Ottawa, UBC Press: Vancouver, 1997.

First-time politicians enter parliament with the initial belief and confidence that they are capable of overcoming any challenges, being a strong voice for their constituents and effecting change, only to be faced with the reality of bureaucratic barriers, evidently resulting in their attention being primarily focused on meeting the short-term needs of their constituents, versus effecting long-term changes at the policy level. Having worked in the capacity of both a reporter and columnist at Queen's Park for 30 years, Jim Coyle has covered four provincial elections, witnessed all three major parties – PCs, Liberals, and New Democrats – in power, and has watched a half-dozen different premiers in office. With the opportunity to compare and contrast approaches and management styles, he has had the advantage of observing what has seemed to be constant in the experience regardless of the era or party in power. Sharing with me some of his observations on the ambitions driving candidates to run for politics, Coyle said:

“Far and away the majority of candidates run for admirable reasons. In most instances they are local leaders who want to improve their communities and give voice to their constituents. Sometimes, it is the logical step up from municipal government. Sometimes, they have got active as a school trustee or education activist. Sometimes, they are motivated by a specific issue that has engaged or enraged them and there are led here by passion or anger. Sometimes they are determined merely to unseat a party in power that they dislike.”¹⁴

I began all my interviews with a question that would help me identify the exact driving force behind a representative group of MPPs who were successfully elected into public office: ‘How would you describe the defining moment at which point you determined you were ready to run for office? What were your initial inspirations and ambitions? Has that changed since Day One?’ A common theme emerged on how overwhelmed and humbled the MPPs were at the realization of the large responsibility they had taken upon themselves on behalf of their constituents. After the recent October provincial election, regardless of whether one was a rookie or veteran MPP, all MPPs were starry-eyed and optimistic; excited for the opportunity to serve their constituents and be a part (or continue to be a part) of Ontario's history. I found that most rookie MPPs explained their inspirations for wanting to be an elected official in their inaugural speech at the legislature: an important occasion where new Members have the opportunity to demonstrate their public-speaking skills in front of fellow Members, as well as talk about their constituents and thank those who helped them during their campaign period. However, it was a unique and pleasurable experience to hear the stories directly from the MPPs, in one-on-one interviews setting, with the allowance for comfortable expansion on particular aspects of what inspired them the most, and how it has influenced the issues they would thereby address at the Legislature on behalf of their constituents.

Two rookie MPPs in particular struck me as obvious representatives of how energetic, excited and optimistic the other rookie MPPs entering government felt upon becoming elected officials: Sophia Aggelonitis (MPP Hamilton Mountain) and Naqvi. Aside from being rookie MPPs, another connection they share is that both were inspired into politics as a result of their family background and the significance placed on giving back and contributing to the Canadian society, being instilled in both Members since a very young age. When Aggelonitis' parents emigrated to Canada in 1960, becoming a Canadian citizen was most important to them. “At the

¹⁴ Jim Coyle, Queen's Park, 2008.

defining age of 8, on a cold October voting day, while walking to the polling stations and pulling a normal 8 year old tantrum, my father turned to me and said, ‘no daughter of mine is not going to vote.’”¹⁵ With the strong support of her family and friends (including her predecessor, Marie Boutrogianni) behind her, Aggelonitis, like any other MPP at Queen’s Park, has the ambition to be a strong voice for the people of her riding. When asked what three issues she was planning on addressing during her time at Queen’s Park, she responded, “Investment in Hamilton, job creation, business and economic development, every Hamilton child should have the opportunity for education at McMaster University; Health and Long-term care for seniors; Education and social service.”¹⁶ Similarly inspired into politics by family, Naqvi’s family has a history of being political, having been involved in the pro-democracy movement in Pakistan.

Like his fellow member, Naqvi also believes that it is a matter of civic duty to be involved in partisan politics, and always knew he was going to run for office. Naqvi has three fundamental issues he intends to work on, all which are constituency based: “1) addressing community safety (drugs and violence), brothels, and drug houses; 2) affordable housing – creating healthy communities. Bring in more funding and resources. I have been successful in bringing in \$8.2 million – this was a result of relations established with the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services; 3) Public transit – greening our community, encouraging light rail public transit project.”¹⁷ While these are the ambitions and inspirations driving rookie MPP backbenchers, I thought it would be interesting to get the perspective on top priorities from a government cabinet minister in particular. Serving not only as a first-time politician, but also a rookie cabinet minister, Minister of Citizenship and Immigration Michael Chan (MPP Markham), was initially inspired into politics with the intention of making a difference in the lives of people living in Ontario. More specifically, as a newcomer himself, he is interested in lessening the challenges faced by other newcomers. “My own first-hand experiences have put a lot into perspective and have aided me greatly in driving my own ministry’s initiatives.”¹⁸ As Minister, some of the fundamental issues and challenges he wishes to address while in cabinet primarily involve expanding opportunity for Ontarians. The overarching themes to be addressed are: “investment in the skills and education of our people, investments in infrastructure, and investment/support of innovation, lower business costs, and strengthening key partnerships to maximize Ontario’s potential.”¹⁹ A liberal ‘through and through’, Jaczek is unlike several of the MPPs I interviewed who were primarily drawn into politics due to their own family’s background and involvement.

“It is totally political for me. My ambition is to get into cabinet and focus on an area. There is no specified burning issue that I want to target at the moment. I plan on spending my first year in office gaining a firm understanding of the house process and how legislation is enacted. I intend to do this by immersing myself into the process and volunteering at all opportunities to speak in the house.”²⁰

¹⁵ Interview with Sophia Aggelonitis, MPP Hamilton Mountain, Queen’s Park, Toronto, 2008.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Yasir Naqvi, MPP Ottawa-Centre, Queen’s Park, Toronto, 2008.

¹⁸ Interview with Minister Michael Chan, MPP Markham, Queen’s Park, Toronto, 2008.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Jaczek, MPP Oak Ridges-Markham, Queen’s Park, Toronto, 2008.

Instead Jaczek was self-inspired into politics due to her own partisan sentiments against the Mike Harris government of 1995. Connecting with Premier Mcguinty in 2001, who had expressed a desire for recruiting more professionals in his government, Jaczek wanted to have a contributing role in a centrist government. Acknowledging her own ambitions, Jaczek was not alone in admitting that there was a competitive atmosphere within the caucus, to become a cabinet minister someday. When asked his opinion on some of the challenges rookies MPPs face when entering Queen’s Park for the first time, Benedetti commented, “Sometimes it is challenging in working with rookie MPPs when they have not fully come to understand the role that they play in government, and the influence they can have on shaping policy. Often new MPPs are also only focused on the few issues/concerns that helped them get elected. It takes time for them to gain an appreciation for broader public policy issues.”²¹

‘Face the Music’: Outside Queen’s Park - Perspectives on ‘Rookie’ MPPs

While the initial MPP inspirations addressed in the previous chapter are admirable, it begs the question (especially in the case of this paper) whether these inspirations and issue priorities alter over time for MPPs depending on the length of their tenure spent at Queen’s Park. When posing the same question as to whether initial ambitions and aspirations change, Coyle’s response was:

“As to how MPPs change over the course of their years, alas, they do. What is so charming about the maiden speeches rarely lasts long. They find how little power an ordinary member has and how difficult it is to get things done. It is impossible to count the number of MPPs who have come to learn, as power has gravitated relentlessly over the last quarter-century away from the legislature and from elected members to the premier’s office and unelected backroomers, how little influence they wield. Many have left frustrated and disillusioned.”²²

Legislative staff member of the Chief Government Whip’s office, Carol Price, stated her opinion on whether initial ambitions and issue prioritizations change over the course of time that a member is in the legislature, from the time they are first elected:

“Members come here thinking they can effect change, whether it is a change in their community or on a province-wide issue. They soon realize that change isn’t that simple, but you can at least be a voice for your constituents. Members soon learn how the place operates; that things don’t happen overnight. Change is a slow process, with its system of checks and balances. Every member soon realizes that first and foremost, you are responsible to the constituents who voted you in here.”²³

With these quotes in mind, it only made sense then to ask the same question of changing priorities and initial ambitions, to an MPP who was experienced, had served as a constituency

²¹ Benedetti, Lobbyist – GR Firm, Sussex Strategy Group, Toronto, 2008.

²² Coyle, Queen’s Park, 2008.

²³ Interview with Carol Price, Staff Member, Chief Government Whip’s Office, Queen’s Park, Toronto, 2008.

representative for over a number of years, and had gained a familiarity, an understanding and an appreciation of the legislative system and its slow changing process/progress. With an ambition to become Ontario's first woman premier, issues that Elizabeth Witmer MPP for Kitchener-Waterloo focused on during the 1990s included the slipping economy, job loss and opportunities, education, and bringing health services closer to home:

“The prioritizations of the issues I address have not changed since the 1990s; the issues themselves have not changed. Graduating students still struggle to find employment in Ontario; there are still long hospital waits and doctor shortages. My approach may have been modified with the success I've enjoyed in these years – a result of good staff, stakeholder relations, and through working in collaboration with all 3 parties for the betterment of Ontario.”²⁴

One change I did take note of, however, was the trend for rookie MPPs entering into politics from a varied pool of professions: law, banking, business, engineering, and the list goes on. I observed that MPPs no longer held previous political experience (i.e. municipal councilor or school trustee) as was seen to be the case with veteran MPPs who generally had some political experience prior to entering provincial politics as an elected official. David Docherty made a similar observation when referring to politicians entering politics at the Federal level. It was noted that one would not survive at Capital Hill without prior experience at the provincial level. MPP Paul Miller was in agreement with this theory, stating that “it is important to have experience in municipal politics (either as a school trustee or city councilor) before entering provincial politics – otherwise you've led a sheltered life. You must have walked a mile in the shoes of another man [constituent] to really understand and know what's going on.”²⁵ Price begged to differ on this point. When transitioning into caucus, one does not require previous political experience. In fact Carol Price has observed that, “it could possibly be harder to adjust into provincial caucus if you've had previous municipal experience. While you're running a one-man show in municipal politics, you're a provincial team member here. The air is different here at Queen's Park.”²⁶

There are a number of apparent transitions that have occurred within the culture and life at Queen's Park over the past few decades. Ontario has experienced a recurring pattern of large sweeps. A Liberal majority in 1987, an NDP majority in 1990, a PC majority in 1995; then after eight years of Tory rule, two large Liberal minorities in 2003 and 2007. “This has done two things. It has washed a lot of good MPPs out, and a lot of not-so-good ones in. Electoral sweeps usually mean that MPPs get elected for the first time as government members, imposing instant constraints and robbing them of the valuable experience and the comparative liberty of opposition.”²⁷ Change of government is not only associated with changing ‘fresh’ policy ideas and energy, but also comes with new attitudes, relationships, patterns and trends established. For rookie Minister Chan, however, the one changing effect time has had on his attitude towards his priorities, is that his view of politics and his responsibilities have become firmer. As Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, he has met many of Ontario's newcomers. “These interactions are

²⁴ Interview with Elizabeth Witmer, MPP Kitchener-Waterloo, Queen's Park, Toronto, 2008.

²⁵ Interview with Paul Miller, MPP Hamilton East-Stoney Creek, Queen's Park, Toronto, 2008.

²⁶ Carol Price, Staff Member, Chief Government Whip's Office, Queen's Park, Toronto, 2008.

²⁷ Coyle, Queen's Park, 2008.

constant reminders of who our government is working for – and what we are working for.”²⁸ Another apparent shift in the evolution of Queen’s Park culture is the changing attitudes, personalities, and relationships between reporters and politicians, and even among MPPs from different parties. In previous years, the atmosphere was much more collegial (in the opinion of several veteran MPPs including Frances Lankin and Elizabeth Witmer, and several non-Members).

“A huge impact on all MPPs, new ones too, has been the significant shrinkage over my years here in the size of the Queen’s Park press gallery. The gallery is now much more Toronto-driven and has far fewer members. In my opinion, a great deal has been lost. When I have spoken to new MPPs, they seem almost shocked that a reporter will even approach them. It was much more collegial. It was not uncommon at all for reporters and MPPs from all parties to sit around the large table in the press gallery lounge drinking beer and telling stories after hours. Newcomers were expected to be quiet and listen. It was a wonderful way to learn the culture and institutional history of the place.”

Since the election of the more ideological governments in 1990 and 1995, all parties seem to have retreated into their own separate camps, with far less collegiality among parties and adversarial sentiments and suspicions felt cross-parties and with the press gallery.

Conclusion:

So how has good governance in Ontario been influenced by the presence of new ‘rookie’ MPPs within the legislature? Through a series of qualitative interviews, I was able to identify common themes, patterns and themes from the perspectives of a varying batch of representative MPPs (both rookie and veteran) as well as those directly related to the Ontario legislature. Common trends and theories that emerged from my qualitative research include the shifting nature of the relationships among MPPs (between those in the government party vying for a role in cabinet office, and suspicions amongst the parties, as well as towards the press gallery). What was once a cordial ‘old-boys club’, is slowly turning into a battleground, with all MPPs fighting for recognition and power. Another identifiable theme is the movement of veteran MPPs who have successfully established their reputation in their riding amongst their constituents tend to focus more on effecting long-term policy changes at Queen’s Park, versus rookie MPPs who have yet to gain the trust and confidence of their constituents, requiring more of a warm-up period in which they initially focus primarily on meeting the short-term needs of their community. When asked the final interview question of what advice could be given to today’s youth who aspire to become tomorrow’s leaders, a common response was to remain connected and heavily involved with community events and the one’s constituents. Connectivity remains a fundamental component for any good governance. For the purposes of my paper, I determined that a balance was held as rookie MPPs brought in the importance for maintaining a rejuvenated, enthusiastic connection with their regional constituents, reminding those sucked into the life of Queen’s Park – who on the other hand, ensure that long-term effective policy goals are addressed as well for the betterment of all of Ontario. In the end, it’s a fine balance towards a better Ontario.

²⁸ Minister Michael Chan, MPP Markham, Queen’s Park, Toronto, 2008.

APPENDIX I

Interview Questions to Rookie MPPs:

1. How would you describe the defining moment in your life at which point you determined you were ready to run for office?
2. When you first ran for office, what were your initial aspirations and ambitions? How has that changed, if at all?
3. What are some of the issues, challenges, and over-arching themes which you wish to address while you're in office?
4. How do you think you've transitioned into your role as MPP?
5. Your electorate obviously have a great deal of faith in you and have high expectations for you to meet - what do you feel is the most challenging aspect of this responsibility?
6. What are some of the more surprising elements of your position and responsibilities as an MPP working in the Legislature?
7. What is one piece of advice you can offer to today's youth who aspire to become MPPs themselves in the future?
8. What is one aspect of life as an MPP that you have come to learn through practice in the Legislature, that you wish you had more knowledge or awareness of when you initially ran for office?
9. As a 'Rookie MPP', what are/were some of the challenges you face/faced as you adjusted into caucus?
10. In your opinion, what are some of the challenges 'rookie MPPs' face from parties opposite?
11. How do you define an 'effective' MPP? Do years of experience in politics define seniority levels in caucus, which then in turn affect how effective an MPP can be?
12. How have your views of politics evolved from when you first got involved in politics to becoming an elected official to today?

APPENDIX II

Interview Questions to Lobbyist:

1. What is the relationship between your GR firm and backbench MPPs and Cabinet Ministers?
2. What are some of the challenges and advantages GR firms may face when approaching Rookie MPPs?
3. Is there any difference felt by your GR firm when dialoguing between veteran and Rookie MPPs?
4. How much of a mentoring role do GR firms play to Rookie MPPs?
5. There is theory that rookie MPPs are more constituency-issue focused at Queen's Park, versus the more policy-focused veteran MPPs who have already established reputations in their ridings. Do you agree with this theory? If so, how does this impact your approach to Rookie MPPs, if at all?
6. In your opinion, what are some of the challenges 'rookie MPPs' face from parties opposite?
7. What is one piece of advice you can offer to Rookie MPPs, with respect to their dialogues with GR firms?
8. How do you define an 'effective' MPP? Do years of experience in politics define seniority levels in caucus, which then in turn affect how effective an MPP can be?

APPENDIX III

Interview Questions to Staff Members:

1. Please describe your role at Queen's Park and your involvement with MPPs, in particular Rookie MPPs.
2. In your opinion, when politicians first run for office, what do you think are their initial aspirations and ambitions? How does that change over the course of their time spent at Queen's Park, if at all?
3. What are some of the challenges rookie MPPs face when transitioning into their roles here at the legislature and in their own constituency offices?
4. Given your experience with Rookie MPPs and assisting them through your orientation process, what is your opinion of rookie MPPs becoming Cabinet Ministers? Are they prepared? What sort of orientation process do they then go through, if any different?
5. In your opinion, what are some of the challenges 'rookie MPPs' face from parties opposite and from within the caucus?
6. How do you define an 'effective' MPP? Do years of experience in politics define seniority levels in caucus, which then in turn affect how effective an MPP can be?

Bibliography

1. Docherty, David C. Mr. Smith Goes to Ottawa, UBC Press: Vancouver, 1997.
2. Pond, David, quoted in Hepburn, N. “Backbench MPPs as Agents of Local Concerns.” p. 2, Intern CPSA Paper 2005.
3. Personal Interview by author with Sophia Aggelonitis, MPP Hamilton Mountain, Queen’s Park, Toronto, 2008.
4. Personal Interview by author with Laura Albanese, MPP York South-Weston, Queen’s Park, Toronto, 2008.
5. Written answer to interview questions by author with Chris Benedetti, Lobbyist – Government Relations Firm, Sussex Strategy Group, Toronto, 2008.
6. Written answer to interview questions by author with Hon. Michael Chan, MPP Markham, Queen’s Park, Toronto, 2008.
7. Written answer to interview questions by author with Toronto Star columnist, Jim Coyle, Queen’s Park, 2008.
8. Personal Interview by author with Paul Ferreira, Former MPP York South-Weston, Queen’s Park, Toronto, 2008
9. Personal Interview by author with Helena Jaczek, MPP Oak Ridges-Markham, Queen’s Park, Toronto, 2008.
10. Personal Interview by author with Sylvia Jones, MPP Dufferin-Caledon, Queen’s Park, Toronto, 2008.
11. Personal Interview by author with Frances Lankin, former MPP for Beaches—East York and Cabinet Minister under Bob Rae government, United Way Toronto, 2008.
12. Personal Interview by author with Amrit Mangat, MPP Mississauga-Brampton South, Queen’s Park, Toronto, 2008.
13. Personal Interview by author with Paul Miller, MPP Hamilton East-Stoney Creek, Queen’s Park, Toronto, 2008.
14. Personal Interview by author with Yasir Naqvi, MPP Ottawa Centre, Queen’s Park, Toronto, 2008.
15. Personal Interview by author with Carol Price, Staff Member, Chief Government Whip’s Office, Queen’s Park, Toronto, 2008.

16. Personal Interview by author with Elizabeth Witmer, MPP Kitchner-Waterloo, Queen's Park, Toronto, 2008.
17. Dianne Cunningham, Paul Ferreira, Paul Miller, Peter Shurman, "Rookie MPPs: What can those on their way in learn from those on their way out?" interview by Steve Paikin, *The Agenda*, October 30, 2007.
18. Sophia Aggelonitis, France Gelinis, Bob Bailey, "Resumption of the Ontario Legislature," interview by Sean Mallen, *Focus Ontario*, March 22, 2008.