

**From Part-Time Worker to Full-Time Professional:  
Examining the Professionalization of the Political Trade in the Ontario Legislature**

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## **Introduction**

There is an old adage suggesting that one should never openly discuss politics or religion in polite company. The reason for this is simple: two controversial topics of conversation, it has been said, can make for one very awkward social engagement. There is, however, an unfortunate consequence that can occur as a result of being so risk averse: the emergence of a public that knows nothing about its own elected officials.

In current day Ontario, few individuals fully understand the real pressures and responsibilities innate to political office. MPPs are tasked with representing their constituencies, completing their legislative duties, confronting the media and towing the party line, all whilst trying to maintain some semblance of a personal life. The majority of an MPP's political life is spent at Queen's Park, not in their own home ridings, and maintaining their persona as "the politician" is an almost 24/7 endeavour. On top of all of these responsibilities, MPPs are endlessly scrutinized by the public and the media, who always believe their actions to be suspect and their motives self-serving.

This, however, has not always been the case. Post-Confederation Ontario saw many of its politicians acting as "part-time" workers; MPPs were only in Toronto for a short period during the year and the rest of their time was spent in their constituency. There was no television, no Twitter, no Facebook, and no powerful mainstream media presence. Balancing a public and private life was, at times, challenging but it was almost always possible. Such a contradictory narrative begs the obvious question: what exactly changed?

This essay seeks to examine the factors that have altered the roles of, and expectations placed on, our Provincial Members of Parliament. It suggests that the rise of the welfare state, the advent of various institutional changes and the ever expanding role of the media, have all played an important part in permanently altering the work of our MPPs. To facilitate this examination, this essay has been split into two main sections: the first section analyzes the above impetuses for change in greater detail, and the second examines the effects that these changes have had on our elected representatives. In concluding, this essay will initiate the discussion on potential remedies that should be considered to mediate these effects. Ultimately, the author's main objective is to raise awareness about what our politicians do and how they really live. Being in politics is no longer a "part-time" job - it is a "full-time" profession, and it is important that we begin to see it as such.

## **Decades of Change: The Factors that Fundamentally Changed the Role of our MPPs**

The roles of, and expectations placed on, our politicians have undoubtedly changed. Over time, the rise of the welfare state, the advent of key institutional changes, and the ever expanding role of the media in politics have all helped to facilitate this shift. This section ventures to expand further upon each of these factors. Although each factor is influential and important on its own, they are, in many ways, interrelated.

### *The Rise of the Welfare State:*

The responsibilities placed on our elected officials inevitably increase with the expansion of government. As governments provide more services, politicians are tasked with ensuring the proper development and maintenance of these programs. In 1867, Ontario's government was

little more than a glorified land provider and accountant; cabinet positions were few and far between, and the majority of these related primarily either to land provision or provincial bookkeeping. Current governments are tasked with far more responsibilities than their predecessors - balancing social inequities, and providing an unprecedented breadth of services to millions of Ontarians, a phenomenon many have suggested was a consequence of the rise of the welfare state.

English historian Asa Briggs defines the welfare state as a state in which “organized power is deliberately used in an effort to modify the play of market forces”<sup>1</sup>. He suggests that this modification by the state occurs through three key means. Firstly, by the state ensuring that individuals and families receive a minimum income regardless of the market; secondly, by limiting insecurities in society by qualifying individuals and families to meet certain “social contingencies”, including sickness, old age or unemployment; and finally, by ensuring that all citizens of the state are offered the best standards available in regards to the provision of social services<sup>2</sup>. Author Christopher Pierson provides a similar understanding, suggesting that a welfare state refers to any “state measures for the provision of key welfare services”<sup>3</sup>. He further postulates that it has become a norm to define a welfare state as a particular form of state, as a distinctive form of polity, or even as a specific type of society<sup>4</sup>. More flippantly, author Thomas Paine defines the business of the welfare state as social administration, or “the mundane task of mopping up poverty and improving public services”<sup>5</sup>. In examining each of these definitions one can ascertain that balancing inequities and providing social services are critical components to any understanding of what it means to be a “welfare state”.

There is, however, far less agreement by academics as it pertains to the reasons for the emergence of a welfare state. A number of popular theories exist that attempt to account for this occurrence. Authors Alan Peacock and Jeff Wiseman observed through their research that expenditures by the British government tended to increase substantially after a major conflict, and opined that this was due to an overall increase in British social cohesion after the war<sup>6</sup>. This cohesion manifested because of the country’s wartime experience, and Peacock and Wiseman argue that it resulted in an increased “willingness to share”<sup>7</sup>, or what Robert Trivers refers to as increased “reciprocal altruism”. An increase in public spending was similarly experienced by the United States, Canada, Germany and Denmark, in which government expenditures “accelerated” after the First World War and have yet to return to pre-WWI levels<sup>8</sup>. This theory, therefore, suggests that the welfare state may have arisen as a direct consequence of violent conflict.

Another theory proposed by German economist Adolf Wagner posits that there was an overall shift in the demand for public goods after the income of the average citizen steadily began to rise during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Wagner argues that once the average public income rises,

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<sup>1</sup> Asa Briggs, “The Welfare State in Historical Perspective,” in *The Welfare State Reader 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*, edited by Christopher Pierson and Francis G. Castles (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006), 16.

<sup>2</sup> Briggs, “The Welfare State in Historical Perspective”, 16.

<sup>3</sup> Christopher Pierson, *Beyond the Welfare State? The New Political Economy of Welfare* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), 7.

<sup>4</sup> Pierson, *Beyond the Welfare State?*, 7.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas Paine, “Approaches to Welfare,” in *The Welfare State Reader 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*, edited by Christopher Pierson and Francis G. Castles (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006), 5.

<sup>6</sup> Leonard Dudley and Ulrich Witt, “Arms and the Man: World War I and the Rise of the Welfare State,” *KYKLOS* 57, no. 4 (2004), 478.

<sup>7</sup> Dudley and Witt, “Arms and the Man,” 478.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

citizens expect their governments to take on new and enhanced responsibilities<sup>9</sup>. Ironically, the reverse would also appear to hold true as the onset of an economic recession appears to similarly result in an increase of public reliance on government. This was evidenced during the last global economic recession, which saw governments taking on the unique responsibility of protecting failed and failing businesses.

A final, but arguably more controversial, theory by authors Allan Meltzer and Scott Richard proposes that the emergence of the welfare state was in fact a natural consequence of democratic growth. For Meltzer and Richard, the extension of the franchise lowered the income of the median voter relative to mean income, which resulted in a greater demand for government transfer payments<sup>10</sup>. While this essay does not attempt to ascertain the exact reasons for the emergence of the welfare state, it is reasonable to suggest that its occurrence may have been due to some mix of any, or all, of these theories.

Canada, and by extension Ontario, was not immune to the welfare state phenomenon. Ernie Lightman and Graham Riches argue that Canada officially became a welfare state in 1935 with the passing of the country's first unemployment insurance legislation<sup>11</sup>. A number of other significant measures were undertaken during this time period which affirmed Canada's status as a welfare state. In 1945, the government introduced a system of Family Allowances which were designed to be a series of universal, non-taxable child benefits paid to the mother<sup>12</sup>. This was accompanied by Old Age Security and the National Housing Act of 1944, but Lightman and Riches suggest that Canada did not reach its "peak of welfare state activity" until the 1960's<sup>13</sup>. This time period saw the introduction of several key pieces of social legislation including the Canada Pension Plan in 1965, the Canada Assistance Plan in 1966 and Medicare in 1966<sup>14</sup>.

It is important to note that welfare states, however, are not stagnant; the amount of social services and assistance offered by a government can depend as much upon political context as it does on the governing party. In the 1990's, under the auspices of a global recession, Prime Minister Jean Chretien began "cut the deficit tactics" which resulted in a number of service cuts<sup>15</sup>. Author Susan Phillips estimates that approximately \$51 billion was withdrawn from social programs between 1990 and 1996 alone, a large amount of which was accomplished by reducing federal funding to the provinces and territories<sup>16</sup>. Lightman and Riches believe that this time period marked the beginning of the "reversal of the welfare state in Canada"<sup>17</sup>.

Academics hold widely differing views regarding the fall of the welfare state - whether it has happened, has yet to happen or if it will ever happen. Author John Myles argues that there are steep political costs involved in pursuing cutbacks to programs that benefit large sections of

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Dudley and Witt, "Arms and the Man," 475-477.

<sup>11</sup> Ernie S. Lightman and Graham Riches, "From Modest Rights to Commodification in Canada's Welfare State," *European Journal of Social Work* 3, no. 2 (2000), 181. This legislation was ultimately deemed to be unconstitutional and Lightman and Riches suggest that it was not until 1943 that serious attention was paid to the structures of a post-welfare state after the onset of the Marsh Report.

<sup>12</sup> John Myles, "How to Design a 'Liberal' Welfare State: A Comparison of Canada and the United States," *Social Policy and Administration* 32, no. 4 (1998), 351.

<sup>13</sup> Lightman and Riches, "From Modest Rights to Commodification," 181.

<sup>14</sup> Lightman and Riches, "From Modest Rights to Commodification," 181.

<sup>15</sup> Lightman and Riches, "From Modest Rights to Commodification," 182.

<sup>16</sup> Susan D. Phillips, "Dual Restructuring: Civil Society and the Welfare State in Canada, 1985-2005," *British Journal of Canadian Studies* 25, no. 2 (2012), 161.

<sup>17</sup> Lightman and Riches, "From Modest Rights to Commodification," 182.

the population<sup>18</sup>, and this may be reason enough for some political parties not to pursue social programming cuts (though recent Conservative actions might refute this assertion). However as each of the public's demands for services has been met over time, the role of the provincial government has also expanded and MPPs have been forced to lead the charge. Politicians have taken on the responsibility for consulting, developing, leading, maintaining and altering the delivery and provision of public services, whether it is through their work as a Minister, as a Parliamentary Assistant, or even as a portfolio critic. As the scope of services increases, so too do the responsibilities of our elected officials, and this can result in a significant change in the amount and type of work required of them.

### *Institutional Changes at Queen's Park:*

There are a number of significant institutional changes that have occurred at Queen's Park since 1867. This section will address three key changes: the change in the number and size of government ministries; the change in the number of House sitting days; and the creation of the Office of the Integrity Commissioner.

### Changes in the Number of Ministries and in the Size of Cabinets in Ontario:

The first legislature of Ontario was struck on July 16<sup>th</sup>, 1867<sup>19</sup> with the successful election of the Hon. John Sandfield Macdonald's Liberal-Conservative party. Macdonald's Cabinet was small by today's standards; it was composed of the Premier and President of the Council, the Provincial Secretary and Registrar, the Treasurer of Ontario, the Commissioner of Agriculture and Public Works, the Attorney General and the Commissioner of Crown Lands<sup>20</sup>. There were only six "ministries"<sup>21</sup> at this time, and six people chosen from Macdonald's caucus to fill these positions. Early ministries were primarily tasked with the management of provincial money and land, as well as the supervision of agriculture and some infrastructure development in Ontario. The public's needs at this time were not as extensive, and early provincial cabinets certainly reflected this fact.

As public needs matured over time, however, so too did Ministry portfolios. In February of 1876, former Premier Oliver Mowat enacted the portfolio of the Ministry of Education, which today remains the second highest budget expense in Ontario. Under former Premier George Ferguson, both the Ministry of Welfare and the Ministry of Health, which today accounts for Ontario's highest budget expense, were enacted in 1924 and 1931 respectively. Other Ministries enacted include the Ministry of Labour in 1919; the Ministry of Municipal Affairs in 1935; the Ministry of Energy Resources in 1959; the Ministry of Social and Family Services in 1967; the

<sup>18</sup> John Myles and Jill Quadagno, "Political Theories of the Welfare State," *Social Service Review* 76, no. 1 (2002), 42. Lightman and Riches also agree; they suggest that public opinion polls consistently support renewed federal investment in social spending, therefore it seems difficult to understand how the public would support cutbacks of this kind (Lightman and Riches, "From Modest Rights to Commodification," 182).

<sup>19</sup> There had been previous Assemblies of the United Province of Canada prior to Confederation, however this event marked the birth of Ontario as we know it today.

<sup>20</sup> Debra Forman, *Legislators and Legislatures of Ontario: A Reference Guide Vol. 1 1792-1866* (Toronto: Legislative Library, 1984), xxix.

<sup>21</sup> The Premier and President of Council is a member of Cabinet but is not typically considered a Ministry; however, today's Legislature does have a position titled "Parliamentary Assistant to the Premier" which is currently held by MPP Laura Albanese.

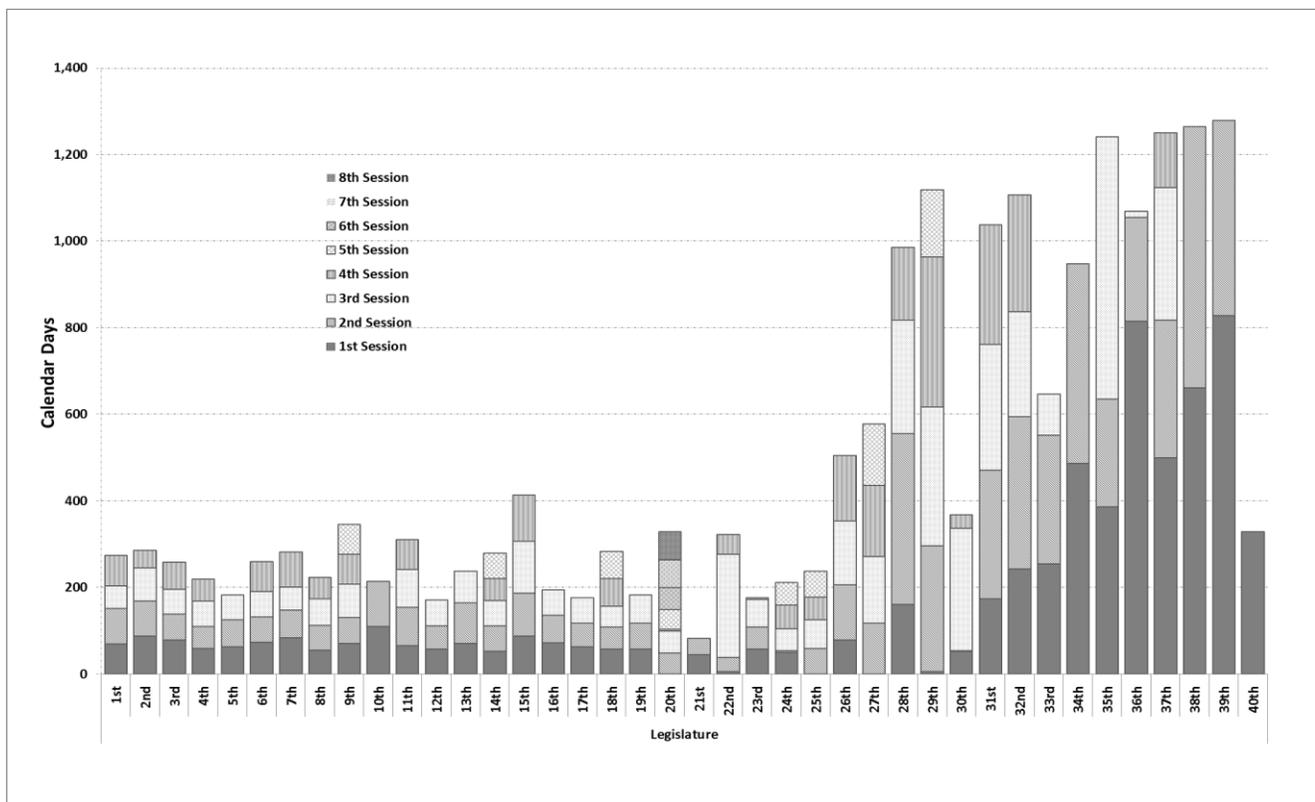
Ministry of University Affairs in 1964; the Ministry of Housing in 1973; and the Ministry of Citizenship and Culture in 1982, amongst many others. What is most fascinating in examining the creation of various ministries is how seamlessly their creation appears to align with the growing needs of the public at the time.

There is a very clear linkage between the rise of the welfare state and the diversification of government ministries over time. As public demand for services grew over time, the government was required to develop ministries that could oversee and manage their delivery. MPPs were tasked with leading, organizing and maintaining these government bodies and this required a substantial amount of work and responsibility.

### Changes in the number of House Sitting Days:

One of the more striking institutional changes that altered the role of the MPP is the increased number of House sitting days. A “sitting day” refers to any day in which a legislature is open for regular business; during this time, members from all parties must be present in the House to debate, discuss and legislate pertinent provincial issues. It is a requirement, therefore that Members be in Toronto for sitting days. As a result of this, constituency visits were typically reserved for Fridays and/or weekends. Graph 1.1 shows the number of sitting days that occurred in each legislature from the first Provincial Parliament in 1867 up until former Premier Dalton McGuinty’s 40<sup>th</sup> Parliament in 2011. Each Parliament was composed of a number of sessions which are also outlined in the graph; the majority of Parliament’s have been composed of four sessions, but many have had more, or less, depending on political context.

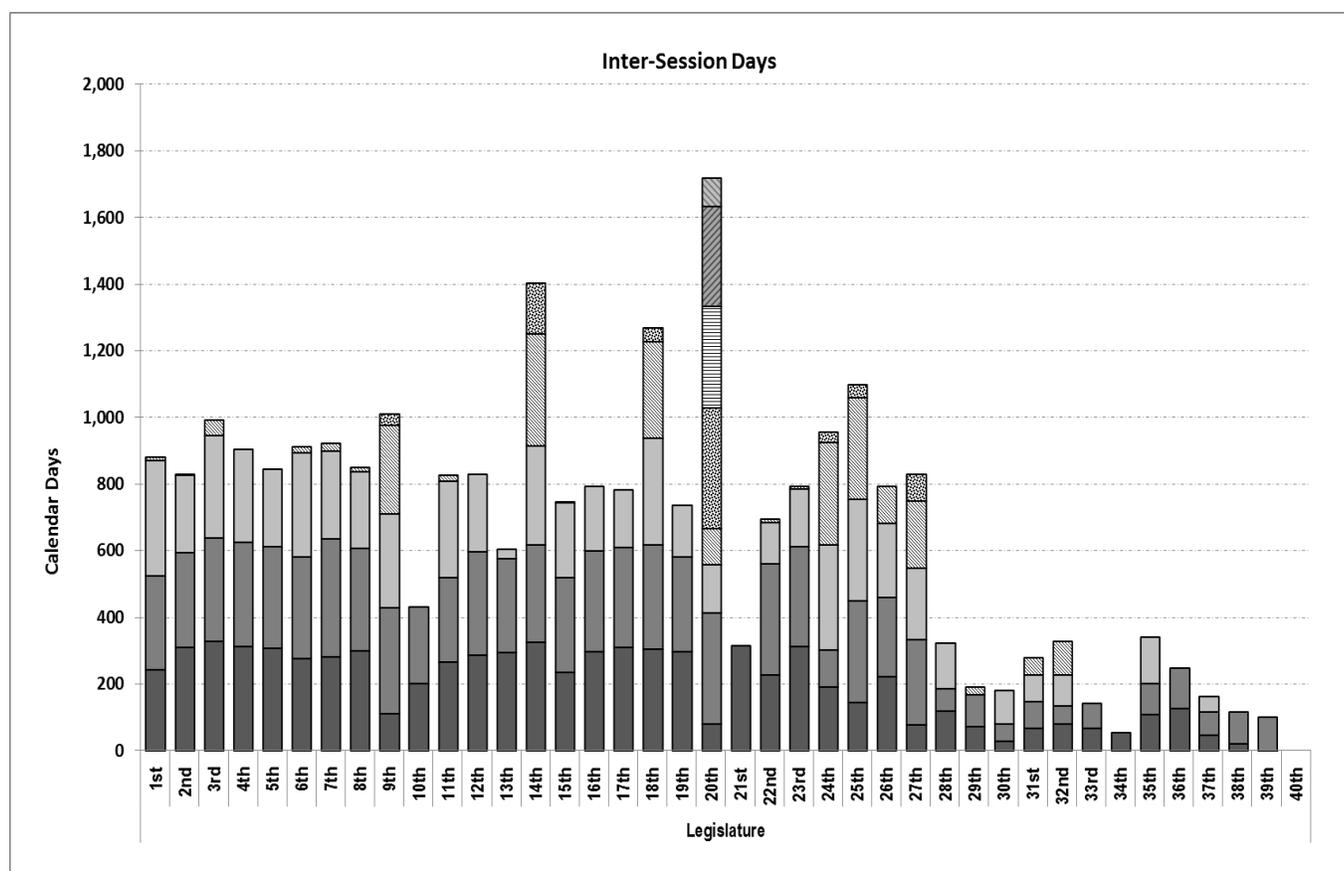
**Graph 1.1: Sitting Days of the Ontario Legislature**



Graph 1.1 shows that there was a significant increase in sitting days after the 27<sup>th</sup> Legislature. The average length of a session from 1867 to 1967 was of 67 days between a total of 108 sessions during this time period. From 1967 to 2011, however, the average length of a session drastically increased to 304 days over only 39 sessions. The contrast between these two sets of data is striking; it had previously been much easier for an MPP to return home during a Parliamentary session. With the increased number of sitting days, however, it appears that this has become increasingly difficult. With the average legislative session lasting almost a year in length, MPPs are forced to spend more time in Toronto, and less time in their constituencies. More work at Queen's Park, with no less work in the riding, makes for a difficult balance to strike.

Graph 1.2 displays the number of inter-session days that occurred between the first Provincial Parliament in 1867 up to Dalton McGuinty's 39<sup>th</sup> Provincial Parliament in 2010. Inter-session periods are breaks in between parliamentary sessions in which the House does not sit or do regular business. The total length of each intersession period in the graph is counted from the day following the date of prorogation of the previous session to either the day before the first day of the next session, or the date upon which the Legislature was dissolved.

*Graph 1.2: Inter-session Days in the Ontario Legislature<sup>22</sup>*



<sup>22</sup> Data used in both Graph 1.1 and Graph 1.2 were compiled by Rick Sage of Ontario Legislative Research Library. Research titled: "Legislatures and Sessions 1867-2010: Legislature, Session and Inter-Session Length". Last updated December 5<sup>th</sup>, 2012.

The graphed data in 1.2 provides an interesting contrast to that found in 1.1. Whereas 1.1 displays a gradual increase in the number of sitting days over time, the former shows a gradual decrease in the overall length and number of inter-session periods. In the period beginning in 1867 and ending in 1967, the total number of inter-session periods was 107 at an average length of 222 days. Conversely, from 1967 to 2010, the number of inter-session periods totalled 32 at an average length of 74 days. Comparing the data from both graphs would appear to indicate that the amount of time spent working at Queen's Park has increased, while the time spent on break has significantly decreased. This implies more time in Toronto for MPPs and less time back in their constituencies.

Though it is difficult to ascertain exactly why this change has occurred, it seems likely that the overall increase in government responsibility over time created a need for more sitting days and less inter-session periods. This theory would appear to substantiate Lightman and Riches' assertion that the province reached its "peak" of welfare state activity in the 1960's; in fact, the shift appears to have occurred around the 28<sup>th</sup> legislature in 1967, immediately following the creation of the three key pieces of Canadian Social legislation mentioned earlier.

While an MPP is never truly "off" during the inter-session, these periods provide an elected official with the opportunity to spend more time in their ridings, and may also allow an MPP to get some much needed personal time. More sitting time, and less inter-session time, has resulted in an increased workload for an MPP and this has fundamentally changed the nature of their role.

#### The Creation of the Office of the Integrity Commissioner:

The expectations placed on an MPP changed drastically with the creation of the Office of the Integrity Commissioner in 1989<sup>23</sup>. This office, originally legislated by the *Conflict of Interest Act, 1988*, originated from society's longing to hold their MPPs publically accountable for their actions<sup>24</sup>. The establishment of this office therefore reflected "the need to maintain high standards of ethical conduct in the public service"<sup>25</sup> and the Commissioner was given exceptional powers of investigation as a result. The current responsibilities of the Integrity Commissioner are five-fold: he/she advises MPPs on conflicts of interest and ethical behaviour; oversees the ethical conduct of a Minister's staff; receives disclosures of wrongdoing from members of the public service and reviews government responses; maintains a public record of lobbyist registration; and reviews the expenses of Cabinet Ministers, Parliamentary Assistants, Opposition Leaders, their staff, and those in the public sector<sup>26</sup>.

The Integrity Commissioner's main objective is to keep MPPs in Ontario publically accountable. Every year, the Commissioner files a public report with the Speaker of the House that lists all of the cases and questions that were received. At times, smaller case reports are also published by the Office following the completion of an investigation<sup>27</sup>. The names of those MPPs who have failed to comply with the Commissioner's direction can be published in these

<sup>23</sup> Sean Conway, interview by author, personal interview, Toronto, May 15<sup>th</sup>, 2013. Conway also felt that this drastically changed the expectations placed on an MPP.

<sup>24</sup> Lynn Morrison, interview by author, personal interview, Toronto, May 7<sup>th</sup>, 2013.

<sup>25</sup> "About Us," Office of the Integrity Commissioner of Ontario.

<http://www.oico.on.ca/oic/OICweb2.nsf/WhoWeAreEn?OpenPage> (accessed April 20<sup>th</sup>, 2013).

<sup>26</sup> "About Us," Office of the Integrity Commissioner website.

<sup>27</sup> "About Us," Office of the Integrity Commissioner website.

reports, and this can make it more difficult for an elected official to avoid public scrutiny when unethical decisions have been taken.

The creation of the Office, therefore, inherently changed the expectations placed on an MPP. Prior to its launch in the 1980's, there were no formal rules or regulations outlining which activities MPPs were, or were not, permitted to engage in - elected officials sat on boards whilst in office, cabinet ministers continued to hold secondary employment, and there was no real system of public accountability. Any unethical action or conflict of interest case was addressed through "internal mechanisms", meaning that any individual case would be dealt with internally by the party's caucus<sup>28</sup>. With the creation of the Integrity Commissioner's Office, MPPs were suddenly required to discuss possible conflict of interest cases with the Commissioner, and could be investigated upon any suspicion of unethical behaviour. The Integrity Commissioner effectively took ethics cases out of the private sphere and catapulted them into the public sphere.

A number of expectations regarding MPP behaviour have since been outlined by the Integrity Commissioner. For example, Ministers are no longer permitted to hold secondary employment and must either take a leave of absence from work, or place any private businesses into a trust<sup>29</sup>. In addition, no MPP is permitted to use legislative resources to promote their private enterprises, and there are tight rules about what kind of "gifts" a member can, and cannot, accept. Volunteering is also limited to honorary positions, and no member is permitted to use an honorary position to fundraise for any organization, political or otherwise. As another example, ministers are not permitted to hold stocks or bonds, and must put these into a trust, or sell them<sup>30</sup>.

Current Integrity Commissioner Lynn Morrison has stated that the majority of MPPs are "well intentioned" and most ethical issues that arise are more often "errors made in good faith or by accident"<sup>31</sup>. While this may be true, the Integrity Commissioner nonetheless places a great deal of pressure on an elected official to abide by the rules, and this has significantly altered the expectations placed upon them.

### *The Increasing Power of Mainstream Media:*

A broad range of technological advances have resulted in an oversaturation of media communication. Television, radio and the internet have provided the public with constant, often immediate, updates on global and local events. This, however, has not necessarily resulted in the emergence of higher quality news. As authors Steven Chaffee and Stacey Kanihan assert, "technology has brought new channels of public communication, but not necessarily better information"<sup>32</sup>. This has been exacerbated by the recent onslaught of social media; reporting is no longer left to the trained journalist, as anyone with access to a Facebook or Twitter account can disseminate "news". This has even spilled over into the world of politics; politicians, vying for public attention, have made it their job to constantly update their social media accounts, while also keeping a close eye on those of their opposition.

<sup>28</sup> Lynn Morrison, interview by author.

<sup>29</sup> Lynn Morrison, interview by author. There is an exception to this rule that is discussed at greater length in a later section. The "doctor's amendment" allows a cabinet minister to practice medicine in order to ensure that they can maintain their license. This time practicing, however, cannot be found to interfere with the member's political working hours (which coincidentally are all the time).

<sup>30</sup> Lynn Morrison, interview by author.

<sup>31</sup> Lynn Morrison, interview by author.

<sup>32</sup> Steven H. Chaffee and Stacey Frank Kanihan, "Learning about Politics from the Mass Media," *Political Communication* 14 (1997), 421.

While the onset of social media is an interesting case study in and of itself, this section seeks to demonstrate how conventional media has altered the role of, and the expectations placed upon, our politicians. Much like the role of government expanded throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, so too did the role of the media. Journalists are more present, more determined, and more involved than ever before as the need for instantaneous news has grown over time. This has had a dramatic, albeit surprising, effect on our politicians: firstly, it has resulted in a change in the nature of a politician's job as they are increasingly forced to take the time to confront, and attempt to control, the media's message; and secondly, it has changed the expectations held by the public toward our MPPs, which has inevitably changed the nature of the relationship between a politician and their constituents.

Through extensive research, authors Claes deVreese and Matthijs Elenbaas were able to identify and examine the historical development of political journalism. They suggest that where post-war political stories tended to be dominated by "a descriptive style of reporting on issues, substance, and politicians' public statements", current political stories have tended to have the added contextualization of a journalist's own observations and analyses of the events<sup>33</sup>. In addition, they argue that current political reporting tends to contain some interpretation of the motives, intentions and tactics behind a politician's actions. DeVreese and Elenbaas have referred to this occurrence as the onset of "strategic news"; a "contemporary coverage of political affairs" which is increasingly "framed in terms of strategy"<sup>34</sup>. The use of strategic news enables a journalist to list not only specifics on the story, but also those tactics, styles and performances used by politicians to pursue their political goals and objectives<sup>35</sup>.

More and more, this unique development in media coverage has required politicians and their staff to attempt to confront and control media messaging. Author Timothy Cook asserts that the most "impressive evidence" of the media's role in government comes less "from what journalists and their organizations do, but instead from the increasing attention that political actors in other institutions give to news making as a central part of their own job"<sup>36</sup>. Graham Knight corroborates Cook's argument, suggesting that political actors have begun to use the media "to communicate more directly with the people," circumventing traditionally used "institutional" means of communicating<sup>37</sup>. It is clear, therefore, that politicians today face a unique challenge that their predecessors did not: they are required to create, control and confront mainstream media as an integral (and often time-consuming) component of their job.

The expansion of the media's role has also been reflected in the changing expectations held by the public towards their elected representatives. The media has increasingly taken on a role as the societal watchdog; greater closeness to the political process has allowed journalists to exploit and reveal "actions and events that were once part of the back region of politics"<sup>38</sup>. But as

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<sup>33</sup> Claes H. deVreese and Matthijs Elenbaas, "Media in the Game of Politics: Effects of Strategic Metacoverage on Political Cynicism," *Press/Politics* 13, no. 3 (2008), 287. Authors Frank Esser, Carsten Reinemann and David Fan refer to this form of reporting as "metacoverage" and suggest that this development of political journalism "affirms the widespread notion that the media are now an important, if not the most important, actors in politics and campaigns".

<sup>34</sup> deVreese and Elenbaas, "Media in the Game of Politics," 285.

<sup>35</sup> deVreese and Elenbaas, "Media in the Game of Politics," 285.

<sup>36</sup> deVreese and Elenbaas, "Media in the Game of Politics," 287.

<sup>37</sup> Graham Knight, "Hegemony, the Media, and New Right Politics: Ontario in the Late 1990s," *Critical Sociology* 24 (1998), 113.

<sup>38</sup> Knight, "Hegemony, the Media, and New Right Politics," 114.

author Gerald Kaufmann suggests, “politicians do not want everything published”<sup>39</sup>, and this greater closeness to the political centre has threatened to compromise the objectivity and credibility of mainstream news media. This type of journalism, often referred to as “attack journalism”, has implicated the media in “cultivating a spiral of cynicism” within the public and has fueled the public’s discontent and disengagement from politics<sup>40</sup>. Kenneth Newton argues that this type of journalism creates “political confusion, fatigue, alienation and distrust” amongst the public who “lack the information, understanding, and the motivation to make sense of the news”<sup>41</sup>. By framing politics in such purely strategic terms, journalists have inevitably changed the relationship between a politician and their constituents: the public expects their politicians to be corrupt and self-serving and unfortunately politicians are the ones left trying to pick up the pieces.

Popular Canadian Journalist Steve Paiken has argued that “there is no experience in any other profession that can compare to being a politician in the crosshairs of today’s mass media”<sup>42</sup>. Dealing with the media is no small task, and as Kaufman suggests, “just as politicians live through publicity, they can also die through publicity”<sup>43</sup>. The expanding role of the media in politics has invariably changed both the role and expectations placed on an MPP in Ontario.

### **The Good, the Bad and the Ugly: The Effects of Change on the MPP**

The previous section of this paper determined that the role and expectations placed on elected officials have changed drastically over time. This section, however, ventures to try and examine the effects that these changes have had on our MPPs. Certainly these changes have resulted in a great deal of personal sacrifice on the part of the elected member; the public may demand a lot from their elected officials, but few truly understand the scope of the sacrifices made by these individuals once they actually attain political office.

#### *Loss of Private Businesses/Career:*

There are no formal laws prohibiting a backbench or opposition MPP from holding a career whilst in political office. In fact, current Integrity Commissioner Lynn Morrison enthusiastically suggests that we should “want to encourage professionals to come into public life”<sup>44</sup>. While there may be no legal impediments to holding a secondary career whilst in political office, there are certainly a number of other obstacles that get in the way. Former MPP for Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke Sean Conway asserts that the business of government was originally only a “part-time job” – it was normal for MPPs to hold secondary employment in their constituencies, and politicians were often indemnified for time spent away from their jobs<sup>45</sup>.

During this time, MPP’s held certain jobs that required time away from the legislature. As an example, farming jobs were particularly prevalent and required necessary time back home

<sup>39</sup> Gerald Kaufman, “Politicians and the Media,” *Parliamentary Affairs* 38 (1985), 321.

<sup>40</sup> deVreese and Elenbaas, “Media in the Game of Politics,” 286.

<sup>41</sup> Kenneth Newton, “Mass Media Effects: Mobilization or Media Malaise?” *British Journal of Political Science* 29, no. 4 (1999), 578.

<sup>42</sup> Steve Paiken, *The Dark Side: The Personal Price of a Political Life* (Toronto: Viking Canada, 2003), 223.

<sup>43</sup> Kaufman, “Politicians and the Media,” 324.

<sup>44</sup> Lynn Morrison, interview by author.

<sup>45</sup> Sean Conway, interview by author.

for seeding<sup>46</sup>. In addition, some MPPs were lawyers who continued on as partners over the course of their time at Queen's Park. Politicians did not receive a lavish pay, and many MPPs had to hold secondary employment to avoid going broke while in office<sup>47</sup>. It is also important to keep in mind that the majority of MPPs during this time were men and these individuals had families to support back home.

As the role of government continued to expand throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the ability of an MPP to hold secondary employment became less and less feasible. Being a modern day MPP requires almost 24 hour attention; politicians spend Monday through Thursday in Toronto either on house duty, meeting stakeholders, attending events, sitting in committee, speaking at caucus meetings, attending ministry briefings, doing media hits, or completing administrative paperwork. In addition, their weekends prove to be no less action packed; Friday through Sunday is spent in the riding meeting with constituents, attending events, holding town halls, or doing tours of the riding. This schedule must also include the necessary family and/or personal time required to maintain a balanced life. Twenty-first century MPPs must always be "on"<sup>48</sup>, and this 24/7 schedule does not allow much extra time for a second career.

The life of current MPP John Vanthof of Timiskaming-Cochrane provides a unique example of how these difficulties can manifest. Prior to his political debut, MPP Vanthof owned and operated a dairy farm just outside of Earlton, Ontario. In addition to his work as a dairy farmer, he served as Director on the Board of the Dairy Farmers of Ontario as well as the President of the Timiskaming Federation of Agriculture. Although he was busy with his many agricultural ventures, Vanthof did well during this time to balance his many responsibilities. He was, therefore, certain that he would still be able to own and operate his dairy farm whilst being an up-and-coming MPP.

Unfortunately, this proved to be far from the case. "From a practical standpoint, there was no problem in running the farm," says Vanthof, "but from a time and family point of view, there were a lot of issues"<sup>49</sup>. Vanthof and his wife Ria attempted to run the farm together after he was first elected. As Vanthof became increasingly involved in his responsibilities as an MPP, his wife and family were forced to take over the reins. "Being an MPP takes over your life," says Vanthof, "and I couldn't commit to doing both things fully or properly"<sup>50</sup>. Vanthof ended up selling the property a year after he was elected<sup>51</sup>.

A similar fate befell former MPP of Wellington-Dufferin-Peel Jack Johnson during his tenure in political office. Johnson was the owner and operator of a small retail store on the main street of his riding when he was first elected. Johnson's wife effectively took over the management of the business while her husband was in office, but this eventually began to put too much strain on the family. After six years in office, Johnson was forced to sell the business because it was simply not possible to balance the responsibilities of keeping it whilst holding political office<sup>52</sup>. As current MPP Ted Arnott states, "Something has got to give. There's only 24

<sup>46</sup> Sean Conway, interview by author.

<sup>47</sup> Sean Conway, interview by author.

<sup>48</sup> Almost every single MPP that I have spoken to on this topic has used this terminology to describe their political careers.

<sup>49</sup> John Vanthof, interview by author, personal interview, Toronto, May 15<sup>th</sup>, 2013.

<sup>50</sup> John Vanthof, interview by author.

<sup>51</sup> What made the possibility of keeping the farm even more difficult for Vanthof was the colossal distance between Queen's Park and his home riding of Timiskaming-Cochrane. In his first year alone, he managed to put 125 000 kilometers onto his car<sup>51</sup>, and this is certainly no small feat.

<sup>52</sup> Ted Arnott, interview by author, personal interview, Toronto, May 16<sup>th</sup>, 2013.

hours in the day, and if you're giving the time required to be an effective member you wouldn't have time for anything else"<sup>53</sup>.

There are a few obvious exceptions to these cases; some careers require an individual to work in order to maintain their license to practice. MPP's Shafiq Qaadri and Eric Hoskins are both doctors who have had to find the time to practice in order to keep their careers in shape. In Hoskins' case, a doctor's amendment was added to the integrity legislation to permit him to work as a doctor whilst maintaining his cabinet position. Make no mistake, however; balancing two jobs is no easy task for an MPP, and it is almost certain that the time they take for practice is time taken away from politically engaging their constituents.

### *Broken Families, Broken Homes:*

One of the most memorable pieces of advice that former MPP Sean Conway remembers receiving during his youth came from his own mother: "Sean," she said, "if you want a destructive family life, go into politics!"<sup>54</sup> Conway's family was no stranger to politics; his maternal grandfather had been the member for Renfrew before him and his family had experienced the difficulties that arose from living a life in the spotlight. MPPs spend much of their time away from home and all of their time representing their constituencies - this can place undue amounts of pressure and stress onto their families.

In his book *The Dark Side: The Personal Price of Political Life*, Steve Paiken closely examines this unfortunate consequence of political life. He relays the story of Jane Stewart, the former MP for Brant, who attended an orientation day on parliament hill and was promptly told to "look around (the) room, because by the end of your political careers, 70 percent of you will either be divorced or have done serious damage to your marriages"<sup>55</sup>. According to political consultant David Goyette this is not far from the truth: "all of a sudden, (politicians) get into this lifestyle that is far more onerous and far more difficult than they thought it was going to be," says Goyette, "it leads to stress, the loss of privacy, the loss of family life, and the loss of intimacy"<sup>56</sup>.

MPP Gilles Bisson, the current representative for Timmins-James Bay and long-time member at Queen's Park<sup>57</sup>, is no stranger to the high costs of politics. While his family has been able to survive his many years in the legislature, he knows that many have not been as lucky. "Being a politician takes up all your time," says Bisson "we are the most public people, yet we have no real friends. You have no friends in this job. You don't even always have time for your family, and you can become consumed in the politics and not even know it"<sup>58</sup>. He claims that over his twenty three years at Queen's Park, new MPPs have come up to him after being elected and have been quite disillusioned with politics. "There are people who get elected into politics and end up being quite disappointed and say to me 'I never thought it would be this way'<sup>59</sup>.

<sup>53</sup> Ted Arnott, interview by author.

<sup>54</sup> Sean Conway, interview by author.

<sup>55</sup> Paiken, *The Dark Side*, 259.

<sup>56</sup> Paiken, *The Dark Side*, 258.

<sup>57</sup> Gilles is one of the few members who have been here for over 20 years. He and MPP Ted Arnott were both elected in 1990 and have been able to remain at the legislature ever since. Their experience was a great help to this paper!

<sup>58</sup> Gilles Bisson, interview by author, personal interview, Toronto, May 15<sup>th</sup>, 2013.

<sup>59</sup> Gilles Bisson, interview by author.

Many in politics know the sad story of former Premier John Robarts. Robarts was an extremely successful and popular politician; he had been in office for twenty years, ten of which he had spent as the Premier of Ontario, and he had been a key part of many important events in the province's history including the Constitutional talks of the 1960's. Unfortunately, his personal life was not nearly as successful. His time in office was terribly difficult on his family and his first wife Norah, who hated Toronto and was an alcoholic, decided to stay back in London to raise their two children<sup>60</sup>. Things did not get any easier for Robarts; at the young age of 21, his son Tim committed suicide, and after an extremely difficult and tumultuous marriage, Robarts and his wife Norah eventually divorced<sup>61</sup>. He later remarried, however his life was never quite the same and on October 18<sup>th</sup>, 1982 Robarts took his own life. While his story may seem like an extreme, John Robarts' life is a cautionary tale on the hardships that can be endured by those in political office.

For the majority of current MPPs, life has become all about balancing the public and the private. "You have to learn to adapt to the life you are in," says Bisson. At times this can be easier said than done; current MPP Ted Arnott asserts that he tries "to spend as much time with my family as I can," but confesses that "it is never as much as I would like"<sup>62</sup>. The pressures placed on our MPPs do not allow for much family or personal time, but for those who are able to strike the right balance, there are certainly benefits to be reaped: a constant, and absolutely essential, family support system.

### **Conclusions: The Advent of the Career Politician**

It is easy at first glance to dismiss all of these concerns and suggest that in wanting to be a politician these individuals inherently "asked for it". The reality, however, is that one does not know what it means to be an elected official until we actually are one. Being elected to office does not mean that an individual has asked for a loss of privacy, for the destruction of their personal lives, or to be constantly scrutinized. These are the unfortunate consequences, often unforeseen, that one is forced to endure when the public chooses someone to be their representative. As a society, we should want our citizens to have a desire to pursue political office, and we should expect them to be treated with respect for the duration of their tenure. However it appears that sometimes these consequences are enough to dissuade some individuals from trying, and for a society that is becoming increasingly less interested in politics, this is extremely problematic.

It is clear that the rise of the welfare state, the advent of institutional change, and the expanding role of the media in politics have inevitably changed the role of, and expectations placed on, our MPPs. This reality is neither positive, nor negative, in nature; it merely reflects the evolution of the public's needs. Some effort, however, must be taken to offset some of the negative externalities that can occur as a result.

There is an enormous misconception regarding the salaries of provincial politicians. MPP Ted Arnott has estimated that "99.9% of people in my constituency think that we get an

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<sup>60</sup> Elyas Burney, "A Profile of Premier John Robarts through Political Dominance and Personal Adversity," Examiner.com, <http://www.examiner.com/article/a-profile-of-premier-john-robarts-through-political-dominance-and-personal-adversity> (accessed May 10, 2013).

<sup>61</sup> Burney, "A Profile of Premier John Robarts," Examiner.com.

<sup>62</sup> Ted Arnott, interview by author.

exorbitant, gold plated pension”<sup>63</sup> and a multitude of other MPPs have insisted that their constituents believe that their elected officials are paid an outrageous salary. One thorough examination of Ontario’s 2013 Sunshine List provides a more realistic perspective. The average base salary of a new MPP hovers around \$116,000; depending on experience and qualifications, an opposition member can expect to be paid anywhere between the base salary upwards of \$135,000, and an opposition leader can expect to be paid between \$160,000 and \$180,000 annually. Parliamentary assistants on average make just over \$133,000 a year, and Ministers can expect their salary to be somewhere between \$165,000 and \$182,000 annually. The highest paid member of the legislature, the Premier, makes just over \$208,000 a year.

If one were to take an MPP base salary and consider the 24/7 nature of the job, however, the hourly average of an MPP is close to \$18.68/hour<sup>64</sup>. When these sums are posited next to the average salaries of those in the public service and private sector, they certainly do not seem as substantive. Some legislative staff, including clerks, Hansard staff and others, are paid substantially more than an MPPs base salary. All deputy ministers, who make upwards of \$200,000 a year, are paid drastically more than their political counterparts, as are many public service directors. Even the Ombudsman and other provincial independent officers have salaries that far exceed that of the average MPP.

As previously mentioned, it is tremendously difficult to find an MPP at Queen’s Park who believes that they should be paid more; however there are a number who might suggest that the job should come with more security. Ontario Members of Provincial Parliament do not receive any kind of pension; these were phased out in 1996 under the Mike Harris government, who did so to lead by example and tighten the proverbial bootstraps of the province. This change, however, has been of great detriment to current MPPs in Ontario. A vast majority of Members spend their time in office during their highest earning years and, as previously mentioned, it is not easy for an MPP to hold secondary employment whilst in office. When one considers the 24/7 nature of a politicians job, it is clear that the \$100,000+ a year salary is not as substantive as initially expected. On top of this, a politician’s tenure in office is not guaranteed; left at the whim of an extremely unstable election cycle, a politician could be employed one moment, and fired the next. So while it may be difficult to argue that an MPP’s salary should be increased, it is not difficult to see why security, in the form of a pension, may not be such a bad idea<sup>65</sup>.

The changing nature of the role and expectations placed on our politicians has brought with it the advent of the “career politician”. Defined in two different ways, a career politician can refer to an individual who spends the majority of their career in public office; or can refer to the professionalization of political office itself. As the public continues to hand more responsibility over to their elected officials, and hardens the expectations placed upon them, more of an MPP’s time is spent trying to serve the public. This is an all-encompassing profession that requires an individual’s full and undivided attention, and though society has become used to the first definition of the “career politician”, we have yet to fully acknowledge the second. Being a

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<sup>63</sup> Ted Arnott, interview by author.

<sup>64</sup> I did this math myself. I took the MPP base salary, as well as the number of hours in a year (I subtracted 7 hours from each day to represent sleep, so the total hours I divided by were 6210.81). Obviously, the estimation is not exact, but it presents a more realistic view.

<sup>65</sup> Vanthof agreed: “There should be some sort of security. If your future is more secure, you make better political decisions. It becomes much less about locking down your own future”.

politician is no longer a part-time job - it is a full-time profession, and we should begin treating it as such.

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