

**Speaking notes for
John Henry, Chair of the Region of Durham**

Region of Durham Council's inaugural meeting

Monday, December 5, 2018

Regional Council Chambers

Whitby, Ontario

The Region of Durham is situated on treaty land that is steeped in rich indigenous history and is the present day home to many First Nations, Metis and Inuit people. Today, we acknowledge that we are gathering on the traditional territories of the Mississaugas of Scugog Island First Nation.

I would like to thank Chief Kelly LaRocca of the Mississauga's of Scugog Island First Nation for joining us today. We are honoured to have your community represented.

Justice Donald Halikowski, thank you for being here today and for your service to our community not only as a judge but as a former commanding officer in the Ontario Regiment, Brigadier General and Honorary Colonel.

The Ontario Regiment (RCAC) is one of the oldest continuously serving regiments in Canada and has existed in what is now the Region of Durham since the earliest days of the 19th century.

There was a period of national tension that gripped Canada in the early 1860's, and other volunteer militia infantry companies were formed in Ontario County at that time. In 1862, two formed in Oshawa, two in Whitby and one each in Prince Albert, Greenwood, Uxbridge, Columbus and Brooklin. Many men were mobilized for service during the tensions of 1864-1866, and as we recognized the end of WWI "the War to end all wars" we must also remember your regiment was led by: Lt-Col. Samuel Simpson Sharpe DSO, M.P. (March 13, 1873 – May 25, 1918). Sam Sharpe was a lawyer, political figure, and soldier from Uxbridge Ontario, Canada. He represented Ontario North in the House of Commons of Canada from 1909 to 1917 as a Conservative and from 1917 to 1918 as a Unionist Party member.

From 1916 until his death, he served as a Member of Parliament while on active duty with the Canadian Expeditionary Force. Along with George Harold Baker, he is one of only two sitting Canadian MPs to die on military service.

Our Ontario Regiment served with distinction during WW2. A significant number of the regiment's soldiers volunteered for active duty with NATO in Germany, United Nations missions in Cyprus, Bosnia, the Golan Heights, Cambodia, the former Yugoslavia, Afghanistan And Iraqis. We must continue to remember our regiment and their continued service, as well as the many sacrifices that have been made to ensure that Canadians live in freedom and the democratic tradition we exercise today.

Good morning ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to your Council Chamber.

This morning, your new Council and I have taken an oath to truly, faithfully and impartially exercise our offices to the best of our knowledge and abilities.

In taking this oath, we have made a promise to Durham's residents - to work on THEIR behalf and to do what is best for our communities, our people and all of our businesses and organizations.

First though, I'd like to recognize some of our guests here today- starting with our Region's own residents: Thank you for taking the time to be with us this morning. We're grateful for your interest and for sharing this historic day with your new Council and Chair.

I'd also like to acknowledge the presence of: (Read from an attendance listing all dignitaries that were present).

Regional Chair and former Councillors (John Aker, Jack Ballinger, Joe Drumm, Derrick Gleed, Joseph Kolodzie, Willie Woo and former Chair Gerri Lynn O'Connor.

Thank you to our local media for attending, as well.

None of us say it often enough, but we appreciate the role you play in a healthy democracy and your coverage of these meetings.

Very special thanks to the new Council's families and friends. You've played a supportive and important role during the recent election. I know my colleagues and I will continue to depend on your support and patience for the next four years.

On a personal note, I'd like to thank my wife Kathy and our daughters Danielle and Jessica for their love, support during the past 12 years. I also wish to acknowledge my brother, Tom, who is present. We are nothing without our families. A special thank you to Patricia Nokes who has kept me organized and on time for the last 7 years.

To Julio and Rosa Rocchio — thank you for treating me as a member of your family and for all that you have taught me for the last 40 years. To my dad who taught me work ethics and my mom who taught me to be humble and the gifts of service.

To the other people who helped get me here today – my political family: Andrew, Robin, Lloyd, Adam, Judy, Lindsey, Moe, Rhonda, Mark and the rest of my team of dedicated volunteers and supporters: A special thanks to you and your families. You've put your lives on hold for the past several months to help make our community a better place to live. I simply wouldn't be here without you.

On behalf of our new Council, I'd like to thank our Chair Gerri Lynn O'Connor, for her dedication to the Region. I would also like to take a moment to remember our friend and Regional Chair Roger Anderson. Roger you were a champion for Durham Region.

Thank you to our CAO, Elaine Baxter-Trahair, and our former CAO, Garry Cubitt, our Commissioners, management and staff - as well as our Regional Clerk and his staff - for their help during our transition. We're really thankful for your work arranging this ceremony today.

The oath we took this morning is symbolic of the public trust that's been placed in my colleagues and me.

Let me assure you that each one of us - both new and returning Councillors - will work to respect and uphold that trust over the next four years.

Just over a month ago, Durham's voters spoke loudly and clearly.

They demanded respect, accountability, transparency from their councillors and a new way of doing business.

Our people want their Regional Government to hear them.

Ladies and gentleman, I'm confident that this new Council will deliver that change and respect for taxpayers.

I believe we have a Council that's built for work - one that will work every day to be accountable, fiscally responsible and provide the new vision and leadership this Region deserves. I'm proud to be serving with this group of people. I know that our newly elected Councillors have the energy and talent to deliver future ideas and practical vision.

Our new regional team has the right balance of professional and elected skill to ensure our Region is well served.

And at the Region, I know we'll be well-supported by the knowledge and experience of our returning Councillors. These Councillors also have a key role to play in mentoring their newly-elected colleagues. For this added responsibility, I say thank you.

As your Chair, one of my responsibilities is enforcing the Council Code of Conduct. I expect each Councillor - new or returning - to live up to the Code each and every day.

Voters told us that their new Council must work in harmony. Everyone here - myself included - will have to check their egos at the door.

Councillors need to put our Region - and not themselves - first in every decision they make. It's not enough to just say "no" to fresh ideas — I would hope all of us will feel inspired to come forward with alternatives and innovative options. Our people deserve that from us.

We have several serious issues in front of us: opiates, mental health, homelessness, domestic violence, taxes, infrastructure, jobs and economic development, housing, our environment, our agricultural community, the employment lands on the 407, 412 and 418, removing of the tolls on the 412 and 418, and General Motors latest announcement - the list is long. Over the coming months, it's our job to build a team and conduct ourselves as a team.

And, of course, the recent announcement by GM has put a dark cloud over everything in the Region. It's the end of thousands of jobs. It's the end of a chapter in our Region's history. And it's hard to imagine how we will move forward from this.

But we will. The people in this room will help see to that.

Sure, we'll have our differences. But, as baseball great Casey Stengel once said, "Getting good players is easy. Getting them to play together is the hard part."

To some extent, that's my role. While I have a clear mandate for change, I have only one vote on the team. My mandate is a moral one - not a practical one. I can only build consensus by helping each team member to shine.

And that's the key: we need to shine as a team, not as individuals. If we do this, Durham will shine too. After all, that's the reason we're all here.

It's all about respect - for each other, for taxpayers - and for the staff that serve you and our Region.

Residents, members of Council and our staff will be treated with respect in this Chamber. Individuals who come before Council will no longer fear being cross-examined or harassed by the people they elected. Those days are behind us.

Similarly, anyone appearing before Council will also be asked to demonstrate respect - even when we're debating a hotly contested issue.

On October 22, voters told us that they want responsible, stable and predictable government. As leaders, we cannot lurch from crisis to crisis. We must create a plan, follow it, measure our progress, update it and work proactively to avoid potential issues and division in our communities.

Despite all the economic and social challenges of the past few years, there is no other region in which I'd want to live, learn, work, play and raise my family.

We are just starting to realize Durham's true potential. Durham Region needs an overriding vision. Not my vision - but YOUR vision. Not a Chair's vision - but residents' vision.

During the election, I pledged to work with each Councillor and staff to turn their ideas into a shared vision for a more affordable, accountable and progressive Durham. In this way, we use every Councillor's best ideas as tools to drive progress.

As Chair, I will never lose sight of one simple fact: I only have one vote and cannot make change on my own. I must work with each and every Councillor to move our citizens' agenda forward.

We must update and begin adhering to Durham Region's Strategic Plan, not just talk it up at election time. All of us must work together to draft and create a new strategic plan.

Our taxpayers are this Region's banker and most important stakeholder. From today forward, I'd encourage every Councillor and our staff to take this to heart. Remember this reality with each and every decision you make.

As a Council, we must do everything necessary to ensure residents have easy access to information through tools like our Region's website.

Our residents are paying the bills. They deserve easy access to reports and financial information.

Durham Region should be envied for having every ingredient for success: skilled and creative people, Durham College, UOIT, TrentU/Windsor and Queen's University in Lakeridge Health, high-value advanced manufacturing expertise, leading health care services, green space, an airport, and deep water port.

People and investment are flowing into our Region with renewed confidence. We will have to work together with our economic development staff, and community stakeholders - including our valued small and medium sized businesses.

We must work harder to SELL Durham Region to our own residents and to the world, in the same way other North American cities have worked to reinvent themselves in recent years.

We must ensure that Durham Region secures its rightful place on our national and international stage.

Durham Region's future success also depends on learning, research, innovation and the commercialization of new technologies.

Ladies and gentlemen, while Durham Region's future is bright we cannot forget that our local economy is undergoing major change: many of our citizens need help. They need hope. And they need opportunities - jobs and education.

I'm confident that this Council will do everything in its power to support and advance these opportunities and support the businesses that play such a key role in our Region. Durham Region is filled with heart, spirit and hope. We have amazing opportunities right in front of us.

I believe we have a moral responsibility to take a leadership role in all matters, economic development, policing, social services and infrastructure.

It's my hope that wherever possible, our Regional Councillors will represent Durham's interests as a team ensuring that our community is responsibly represented at regional headquarters.

So, as you begin your duties, let's seize this unique opportunity to transform our Region - by working together and living up to the oath you've sworn here today.

My friends, your actions and decisions over these crucial four years will determine our Region's direction for the next 10-20 years.

I know you'll take your duties and responsibilities seriously. I know you'll put Durham Region's interests ahead of your own.

Your constituents expect nothing less. Your neighbors' and our community are counting on us.

We can't afford to let them down.

So, let's get out there AS A TEAM, and truly amaze our community and our neighbors.

Thank you. -