

I am here to support Regional Councillor Joe Li's motion.

President Abraham Lincoln once said "If you want to test a man's character, give him power". This is so true of the election of the York Region Chair. We have seen the manifestation of this statement by key players in the last election, the Region Chair, the Mayors, and the Regional Councillors alike.

It was reported that Region Chair Wayne Emmerson opposes making the position elected because many residents do not understand the chairperson's role. I believe that he is insulting the intelligence of many of us.

Emmerson also believes the mayors and Regional Councillors want to choose the person they want to lead them to represent the interests of the region as a whole. I think maybe he mistook their intentions to further their own agendas as such.

Right after the municipal election, Regional Councillors begin lobbying each other for support in order to get on a certain committee or another, or to be selected Region Chair. This statement came from one of the insiders - "You support me on this and I will support you on that". Enough said.

Mayor Frank Scarpitti's speech delivered a few minutes ago was meaningless. Direct election of a Region Chair by electors is already practiced in Halton, Waterloo, and Durham – Three of the six Region Municipalities in Ontario. It started with Waterloo in 1997, Halton in 2000, and Durham in 2014.

At this time, Bill 42 - a provincial legislation that would enable voters to select their York Region Chair is still a work-in-progress. But that does not stop us from a complicated “triple majority” exercise necessary to effect the change to public election of Region Chair under existing provincial rules.

Under the current system, the York Region Chair has no mandate from the residents of York. It is in debt to the small circle of “voters” within the York Regional Council who put him there. He will have to cater to their demands and not necessarily those of the Region’s in order to secure another term every four years. It is imperative that change must come and without further delay.

On Nov 10, 2015 democracy, transparency, and accountability prevailed at the City Council in Markham. The members passed the motion (9 votes to 4) to allow for public election of the York Region Chair put forward by Councillor Karen Rea.

While this is a small step towards to the realization of this democratic process, it is a giant step in the right direction. Bill 42 will get a boost and other municipalities will be encouraged to follow Markham’s lead to eventually complete the wishes of a majority of their residents.

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