

## Liberals' majority win Ontario story of the year

by Lindsey Cole Dec 29, 2014

The provincial Liberals toppling opposing parties and forming a majority government came out on top as the biggest newsmaker among Ontario construction leaders this year.



"It is funny how a year changes things a little bit," says Andy Manahan, executive director of the **Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario**.

"The majority government though, is really a turning point. Just getting things through the house, and getting the votes for certain things will be a lot easier, so I think that's significant."

With that said, the ongoing squabbling between Ontario and the federal government over infrastructure funding isn't helping progress.

"There's been a lot of bickering between Queen's Park and Ottawa and I think it's holding back Ontario with respect to delivering an infrastructure program in an effective way," Manahan explains.

Patrick McManus, stakeholder relations manager with the Ontario Sewer and Watermain Construction Association, is also optimistic about having a majority government.

"Having a majority government elected, especially one that has an infrastructure mandate, and one that seems intent on accomplishing that mandate, is quite fantastic. That helps us addressing issues and pushing issues that we had more or less held on to," he says.

Ontario plans to invest more than \$130 billion in infrastructure through a 10-year economic plan.

"The ones (contractors) that work in all corners of the province, they kind of deal with what's happening on a year-to-year basis on contracting, so they never know whether they should be ramping up their crews in one region of the province or another. It's always been very difficult to do long-term planning," he explains.

"Having a long-term plan, which we realize is not set in stone, at least gives us an idea of where money is being prioritized."

"With a majority government, suddenly there's a lot more clarity of where the focus is going to be from a government point of view and a regulatory point of view over the next four years," adds David Frame, director of government relations with the Ontario General Contractors Association.

He also says the reviews of the Ontario College of Trades and the Construction Lien Act were sound decisions.

"The college from our point of view, wasn't meeting expectations," he says. "We believe it's the appropriate time to take a step back."

The review will examine specific issues related to the College's scopes of practice and the process for determining whether certification should be compulsory or voluntary.

Frame also states the review of the Construction Lien Act was welcomed news, and wouldn't have happened without Bill 69, the Prompt Payment Act, even though it died on the floor of the legislature in May 2014.

"It was the catalyst to bring forward the review of Construction Lien Act and how construction payments help, as well as, the next step on the prompt payment discussion," he says. "Without Bill 69 we wouldn't be there."

Ian Cunningham, president of the Council of Ontario Construction Associations, also emphasizes the significance of Bill 69, an issue he will continue to push for.

"It was our number one priority and it was kind of bittersweet," he says. "We pushed it along very very far in the legislative process, but unfortunately we didn't push it across the finish line. In my view it's inevitable for Ontario, even if we are the last jurisdiction on the planet to have prompt payment legislation. It's not going to die here."

Sean Reid, vice-president, federal and Ontario, of the Progressive Contractors Association of Canada (PCA), also acknowledged the significance of a majority government, but says two other issues stood out for him.

The first was the Fair Construction Campaign the PCA launched, which aims to forewarn municipalities that could be targeted by construction labour monopolies.

"We think that's going to be an increasingly costly and unjust issue if it's not addressed. 2014 unfortunately saw more evidence of that," he says. "Ultimately it's going to require change to law. The government's going to have to decide when it's ready to address this issue."

Second, and possibly the biggest highlight on his year-end list, was a gathering of industry stakeholders at a roundtable discussion hosted by think-tank Cardus called the Building Meaning Project. This was geared towards reshaping the preconceptions of working in the trades.

"Every sector of our industry...fundamentally agreed on the core principles of working to elevate the inherent dignity and meaning of the trades," he explains. "That was pretty profound, realizing we have so many things in common. There's two or three hot button issues that separate many of us, but there are many issues around which we are actually united and actually have common ground."