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Dalton McGuinty spoke at the Ontario Road Builders' Association convention in 2010.

Ontario construction reflects on McGuinty legacy

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Dalton McGuinty will be remembered by Ontario construction as the infrastructure premier, say industry stakeholders.

"He and his government have recognized that economic infrastructure is a long-term investment. You can't turn it down, you can't turn it off just because you've got budget issues and that investing in hospitals, schools, public buildings, roads, sewers, etc. is a vital part of growing and building the economy," said David Frame, director of government relations for the Ontario General Contractors Association (OGCA).

Following news of his decision to resign and prorogue Queen's Park, construction leaders reflected on the impact McGuinty had on Ontario during his nine-year tenure as premier and 16 years as leader of the Liberal party.

Under his reign, the Liberals created a 10-year infrastructure plan to focus on economic growth and improve asset management. It created an expanded role for Infrastructure Ontario. The six years prior to the June 2011 announcement saw an annual average of \$10 billion in infrastructure spending.

"He's really the first premier in quite a few years who recognized that and continually made the type of investments that Ontario needs to be a powerhouse for years to come," said Frame.

Patrick Dillon, business manager of the Provincial Building and Construction Trades Council of Ontario, said McGuinty has a positive legacy in a number of areas, such as education, health care and in the environment.

"I think his drive towards a province where people earned reasonable wages is also part of his legacy," he said.

McGuinty was first elected to Queen's Park in 1990 to represent Ottawa-South and was elected Liberal party leader in 1996. He was elected premier with a majority in October 2003 and again in October 2007, before being reduced to a minority in October 2011.

During McGuinty's tenure, the role of Chief Prevention Officer was created, moving the responsibility from the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB) to the Ministry of Labour.

"Prevention wasn't getting the attention it deserved at the WSIB and I'm optimistic that the changes recommended in the Dean Report, and more, will eventually be accomplished by the Chief Prevention Officer," said Ian Cunningham, president of the Council of Ontario Construction Associations (COCA).

In 2009, the Liberal government legislated the Ontario College of Trades (OCOT) to be an institution run by the skilled trades industry and arm's length from the government. It will represent the construction, motive power, industrial and services sectors.

The construction industry has been split on the concept and execution of the entity, which is expected to begin enrolling members in early 2013.

"The one side would say the opposition to the college is based on misinformation but certainly the notion of the establishment of this self-governing trades organization has boiled up some opposition in the construction sector," said Cunningham.

After the most recent election, McGuinty assigned two ministries to one MPP in an effort to reduce the size of cabinet and costs. The ministries of infrastructure and transportation were assigned to Bob Chiarelli.

Executive director the Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario (**RCCAO**), Andy Manahan called it a logical mix.

"I think from what we've seen in the past with energy and infrastructure together sometimes infrastructure does take a little bit of a back seat. I think from our perspective as a construction sector, we'd want to see the continuation of a standalone ministry of infrastructure."

McGuinty's resignation was accompanied by his announcement to prorogue the legislature, making some speculate how long it will be on hold.

Manahan says he does not believe the legislature needs to be prorogued at this time. Though regulations for water opportunities were not under consultation, he had heard that there was going to be consultation on it in early 2013.

"There may be some movement on it, but without committees and that structure to hear the feedback from various members of the public and various sectors of the economy, all that stuff virtually grinds to a halt," he said.

Dillon said the legislature had been on hold for the last while anyways.

"The only thing that is of interest to the opposition parties seem to be the issues around the Ontario Power Authority and the projects in Oakville and Mississauga being moved...I think there's a whole lot more to Ontario than that but it seemed pretty obvious that we were going to be stuck on that channel for a number of months. This way we're not."

McGuinty has asked Liberal party president Yasir Naqvi, to convene a leadership convention at the earliest possible time. McGuinty will remain as premier until that convention and will continue to be the MPP for Ottawa South until the next election.