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Cabinet shuffle

New Ontario energy and infrastructure minister a 'good choice,' industry says

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Ontario construction has a familiar face now at the helm of the energy and infrastructure ministry in former labour minister Brad Duguid following the latest Queen's Park cabinet shuffle.

"Brad Duguid is a good choice," said David Zurawel, vice president, policy and government relations, Council of Ontario Construction Associations (COCA).

"He is familiar with infrastructure and construction issues and we had a good experience with him when he was labour minister. We have some established relationships," Zurawel said.

"We hope we can translate those into an effective means to move forward with the province's 10-year, \$60-billion infrastructure plan."

Premier Dalton McGuinty assigned Duguid to the energy and infrastructure post in his latest cabinet shuffle Jan. 18. The series of moves are designed to reinvigorate the Liberals in their run up to the 2011 provincial election, Queen's Park insiders say.

Construction industry stakeholders had lobbied heavily to have the so-called "superministry" of energy and infrastructure divided to allow a greater focus on infrastructure needs.

There is disappointment that infrastructure did not become a single ministry, but Zurawel said he has faith that Duguid will be effective on that file.

He notes that during his time as both labour minister and parliamentary assistant in municipal affairs and housing, Duguid was exposed to a variety of construction, infrastructure and planning issues.

Andy Manahan, executive director, Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario, said McGuinty may be sending out a signal that the superministry was not just created for former minister George Smitherman, but to help achieve efficiencies in areas like streamlined approval process for alternate energy and growth plan projects.

"It is our hope that greater use will be made of parliamentary assistants to work on the energy and infrastructure files, respectively, so that the views of the construction industry are heard," added Manahan.

The Ontario General Contractors Association is also disappointed that infrastructure will not be a standalone ministry but welcomes Duguid's appointment.

"We have had previous experience with Minister Duguid and look forward to working with him to restore the relationship between the construction industry and the ministry," said Clive Thurston, president, OGCA.

With Chris Bentley remaining in place as attorney general, Peter Fonseca (labour), John Milloy (training colleges and universities) and John Gerretsen (environment) along with Duguid's running of energy and infrastructure, COCA believes construction issues such as Lien Act and Environmental Assessment reforms and establishing the College of Trades will benefit.

"On the issues that still have work to be done, they have stayed the course and that is good to see," said Zurawel. "That signals a commitment to getting the work done before the end of their mandate," said Zurawel.

Former education minister Kathleen Wynne was moved to the transportation ministry, replacing Jim Bradley, who moves to municipal affairs and housing.

The Ontario Road Builders' Association (ORBA) hopes to continue with Wynne the strong partnerships it enjoyed with Bradley.

"Core infrastructure improvements continue to be a high-priority, as well as important expansion projects such as the Windsor-Detroit Border Initiatives and the 407," said Karen Renkema, director, government relations, ORBA.

"No doubt, our relationship with Minister Bradley will continue as he assumes the challenging role of minister of municipal affairs and housing. Municipal infrastructure funding will always be at the top of ORBA's agenda."