

Caplan played significant role in Ontario's infrastructure modernization, stakeholders say

Angela Gismondi July 26, 2019



Construction industry stakeholders were saddened to learn about the sudden passing of Ontario's first infrastructure minister David Caplan, who they said helped shape the ministry into what it is today.

Caplan passed away July 24 at the age of 54.

Caplan was appointed Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal in 2003 to lead the newly established standalone infrastructure ministry in the province. Under his leadership, initiatives were put in place that lead to the modernization of the province's infrastructure, stakeholders agreed.

"It's his legacy," said Clive Thurston, president of the Ontario General Contractors Association. "It had never existed before. To his credit he reached out to the industry and asked us to work with him...to play a significant role in setting up the whole ministry. It was a lot of work and he took it from its infancy to what we see today."



David Caplan

In addition to holding cabinet positions in health and infrastructure, the Liberal MPP, represented the Toronto ridings of Oriole and Don Valley East from 1997 to 2011. More recently, in November 2017, Caplan was named the chief operating officer (COO) of the Ontario Road Builders Association (ORBA). He stepped down from the role in July 2018.

He was always thinking about how to do things innovatively

— Andy Manahan

Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario

“ORBA was privileged to call on the services of Mr. Caplan, whose knowledge of Ontario’s infrastructure sector was unsurpassed,” states a release issued by ORBA.

“The construction industry and the ORBA community in particular, are shocked and saddened to hear of David Caplan’s passing,” said Bryan Hocking, ORBA’S COO, in a statement. “On behalf of our president, Steve Smith, our Board of Directors and ORBA members and staff, we offer our deepest and heartfelt sympathies to his wife and family.”

During his time as minister, Caplan made it a point to engage stakeholders in the construction industry, explained Ian Cunningham, president of the Council of Ontario Construction Associations.

“He had a construction advisory committee – he was the last minister to have to it – that provided him with advice about issues and concerns of the industry,” Cunningham said. “He was exceedingly accessible for me, he was friendly, engaging and non-partisan. He seemed to be not only respected but liked by everybody in the construction industry and also by all political parties.”

Caplan was most known for leading the development of Renew Ontario, a \$30 billion provincial investment plan; helping to introduce new finance delivery models such as AFP (Alternative Financing and Procurement) used in Public Private Partnerships and Infrastructure Ontario; and helping create the Places to Grow legislation.

“The first-ever RCCAO (Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario) report – Richard (Lyll of the Residential Construction Council of Ontario) and I hand delivered that to David in his office,” recalled Andy Manahan, executive director of the RCCAO. “From that perspective he always had an open door policy. When he was minister we probably had more face time with him than any other minister since.”

“He was an ideas person,” Manahan added. “He was always thinking about how to do things innovatively.”

In an email to the Daily Commercial News, Giovanni Cautillo, executive director of the Ontario Sewer and Watermain Construction Association, said he and Caplan had many interactions and worked closely to advance common issues.

“When David Caplan held the position of executive director at the Ontario Road Builders Association, the OSWCA welcomed the opportunity to work more closely with David towards our mutual successes,” said Cautillo. “The heavy civil sector of construction is very large, but at the same time, very closely knit. All the members of the OSWCA are saddened by his passing.”

Rob Bradford, of the Toronto Area Road Builders Association, was executive director of ORBA while Caplan was infrastructure minister.

“He was engaged and always listened,” said Bradford in an email to The Daily Commercial News. “Apart from being a dedicated public servant for all the right reasons, David was a down to earth ‘everyman’ and I enjoyed talking with him over coffee or a cold beer on more than one occasion. He would rather do what was right than what was expedient. A breath of fresh air in a tough business.”

Caplan is survived by his wife, Leigh Caplan, two sons, Benjamin and Jacob, his parents, Wilfred and Elinor Caplan (Liberal MPP 1985 to 1997), his sister Meredith Caplan, and two brothers, Mark Caplan and Zane Caplansky.