

When will Ford's honeymoon end?

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There's little doubt Toronto Mayor Rob Ford is on a roll. As he said, he got everything he wanted at city council's first regular meeting of this term on Dec. 16. The council voted 39-6, 40-5, and 28-17 to support three items of his election platform: repealing the personal vehicle tax, reducing the limits on councillors' office expenditures, and asking the provincial government to designate Toronto's public transit an essential service.

Ford's honeymoon will last as long as a majority of the council supports his program. In assessing how long, the best place to start is with the voting on the above three items. A total of 13 votes were taken during the three debates as well as several procedural votes. The 13 votes included such substantive matters as whether council should have a plan for replacing the lost revenue before repealing the vehicle tax.



On these 13 votes, half the councillors voted the same way as the mayor more than 90 per cent of the time. These 22 councillors were: Paul Ainslie, Michelle Berardinetti, Gary Crawford, Vincent Crisanti, Mike Del Grande, Doug Ford, Mark Grimes, Doug Holyday, Norm Kelly, Chin Lee, Gloria Lindsay Luby, Giorgio Mammoliti, Mary-Margaret McMahon, Peter Milczyn, Denzil Minnan-Wong, Frances Nunziata, Cesar Palacio, John Parker, Jaye Robinson, David Shiner, Karen Stintz and Michael Thompson.

Seven councillors voted with the mayor between 50 and 70 per cent of the time: Ana Bailão, Raymond Cho, Josh Colle, Frank Di Giorgio, Josh Matlow, Ron Moeser and James Pasternak.

Fifteen councillors voted with the mayor less than 50 per cent of the time: Maria Augimeri, Shelley Carroll, Janet Davis, Glenn De Baeremaeker, Sarah Doucette, John Filion, Paula Fletcher, Mary Fragedakis, Mike

Layton, Pam McConnell, Joe Mihevc, Gord Perks, Anthony Perruzza, Adam Vaughan and Kristyn Wong-Tam.

The votes show that the mayor enjoys strong support for his program. Indeed, it seems he can muster the votes required for a majority from among his strongest supporters without reaching out to those whose views are less aligned with his own.

What characterizes his strongest supporters? Fifteen of them are councillors he appointed to or proposed for key positions, including Doug Holyday as deputy mayor, Karen Stintz as chair of the Toronto Transit Commission, and Mike Del Grande as the city's budget chief. These 15 have some obligation to continue to support the mayor's program in return.

Of special interest are six of the remaining seven among the mayor's strongest supporters. (The seventh is Doug Ford, who seems always to share his brother's views.) Four of these six — Gary Crawford, Vincent Crisanti, Mark Grimes and Gloria Lindsay Luby — achieved about the same or fewer votes in their wards than the mayor. If they need to, they could argue that in aligning themselves with the mayor they are respecting the wishes of their constituents. Two — Mary-Margaret McMahon and Chin Lee — received more votes in their wards than the mayor.

McMahon's performance on Dec. 16 was the most puzzling. She represents a ward in which the mayor came a distant second. She received almost twice as many votes as the mayor in her ward (the second largest such margin after Adam Vaughan, who more than tripled the mayor's vote in his ward). Her constituents may be calling already to question her apparent close alignment with the mayor's program and disavowal of her own election platform, which included not repealing the vehicle tax.

Chin Lee was the only councillor now strongly aligned with the mayor who publicly supported another mayoral candidate just before the election. This is a hint that he may be less comfortable with his current alignment than others who are so aligned. He and McMahon could well be the first defections from the group of the mayor's strongest supporters.

If these two councillors become less aligned with the mayor, they would likely position themselves among the middle group of councillors: the seven who on Dec. 16 voted with the mayor between 50 and 70 per cent of the time. One of this group, Josh Colle, was almost in the group of 15 who usually voted differently from the mayor. He could easily move into the latter group as the months pass.

Power attracts. If the mayor and his team continue to be successful, the drift on council could be toward the mayor's positions rather than away. At least two factors suggest that movement will be away from the mayor.

One is the internal contradictions in the mayor's positions. The repeal of the vehicle tax will add \$64 million to Toronto's anticipated 2011 deficit of several hundred million dollars. The mayor

promised a freeze in property taxes, notwithstanding the enhanced potential deficit and numerous unavoidable increases in the city's costs. He claimed on Dec. 16 that the freeze can be implemented without major service cuts. He did not indicate how sufficient savings could be realized to achieve the freeze, or how other revenues could be found.

The mayor has given himself and council a near-impossible task. Two possible ways out have already been rejected. One would be to defer the impacts until later years, but the mayor promised this would not occur. The other would be to seek funds from the provincial government.

The province has often bridged Toronto's budgetary shortfalls, but this council may have burned the bridge. It will be difficult for the council to plead hardship soon after repealing a source of revenue. Moreover, the mayor has said often that Toronto has a spending problem not a revenue problem. This could be a clear message to the provincial government to direct available funds elsewhere.

As contradictions among the mayor's positions become more evident, support for his positions could well wane.

The second factor that could lead to a bleeding of councillors' support for the mayor is the provincial election to be held on or before Oct. 6, 2011. The mayor is a staunch member of the Progressive Conservative party but some among his strongest supporters would appear to be Liberals. They may become less interested in helping the mayor succeed unless he is at odds with his own party. If he is at odds, there could be tensions with his Progressive Conservative colleagues.

There was one way on Dec. 16 in which the mayor usually voted differently from most council members. It was on the pernicious practice of moving to terminate debate, thereby denying some councillors the opportunity to speak on an issue. There was one such motion during each of the three key debates. Only the mayor and four councillors — Glenn De Baeremaeker, Doug Ford, Doug Holyday and Josh Matlow — voted to keep the debate going on all three occasions.

Another commendable feature of the mayor's performance on Dec. 16 was his participation in every one of the 16 votes noted above. This he had in common with 34 of the 44 councillors. The usual reasons for not voting are that a councillor doesn't know how to vote or doesn't want to be seen voting in a particular way. Two councillors — Michelle Berardinetti and Anthony Perruzza — missed three or more votes. They may have had good reasons, such as indisposition or a family emergency, but if one but not the other of these councillors continues to skip votes so often that could also hasten the end of the mayor's honeymoon.

Richard Gilbert was a Toronto councillor from 1976 to 1991.

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