

## Rob Ford will captain change: Ashton

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Out with old, in with the new! There's a new sheriff in town.

No sooner had the good ship Toronto changed captains; he was barking commands and setting sail on his four year voyage.

Call me old fashioned, but I expected our new mayor's dreams and ambitions for Toronto would be launched amidst the pomp and ceremony of Toronto Council's inaugural meeting.

Inaugural speeches are steeped in history and provide leaders of nations and, in this case, one of North America's largest city governments, an opportunity to share their goals and vision with the public.

These moments can be electrifying, inspiring and define a leader's character. Who can forget the words of John F. Kennedy that captured the minds and hearts of Americans: "Ask not what your country can do for you — ask what you can do for your country." A pivotal moment in history that galvanized a generation and redefined public service.

Past Toronto mayors have followed this custom and used the inaugural meeting of council to share their future plans with their fellow politicians, build partnerships, and capture the essence of their mandate.

But Mayor Rob Ford couldn't wait for the first meeting before laying out his four priorities for the coming term as he walked into his new office for the first time — clean and transparent government (heard that one before); customer service (death to voice mail); cut size of government (size matters); and new city transportation plan (trackless in Toronto).

Not to be predictable, and looking for something to put under everyone's tree, Ford added no tax increase next year. As reported in the Sun, even Deputy Mayor Doug Holyday said he had no idea a tax freeze was coming. Don't feel left out Doug, soon-to-be Budget Chief Mike Del Grande was caught with his ledgers down, too. And he'll have to make it balance.

Do the mayor's recent machine-gun-like surprise decrees in the hallways of City Hall warn of things to come? Is this a new style of political blitz where all in the path are pushed aside?

For many councillors, even those on the inside track, the mayor's first-day declaration is a stiff warning: "Everyone's going to have a discussion on that, but I'm the mayor of this city."

Mutiny this soon on the maiden voyage is unlikely, but the seeds of discontent are in the wind. In the words of outsider Coun. Joe Mihevc, in response to the mayor's call for the death of former mayor Miller's beloved Transit City: "The first thing that the mayor needs to learn is that council is supreme — not the mayor." Ya think?

But Ford seems comfortable in his new skin and wields his election mandate with confidence.

Remember it was an election won on stopping things — the infamous Gravy Train. Reversing the unpopular vehicle registration tax and land-transfer tax. Killing Toronto's Transit City light rail plan. And cutting spending and the city budget by \$3 billion over four years.

Stop, reverse, kill, and cut are the driving words at the heart of the Ford mandate.

Make no mistake, Ford is shifting Toronto's direction in favour of less government over high taxes and chronic government meddling. Though yet to reach the status of corridor fiat, he also wants to open the doors of City Hall to the private sector.

His key appointments of councillors Holyday (deputy mayor) and Denzil Minnan-Wong (chair of works and infrastructure), both strong proponents of privatization and contracting out, send a clear message to management there are no sacred cows. How City Hall does business will change.

So we don't have to wait for the mayor's inaugural speech, if there is one. Council has its marching orders — less government is good government, City Hall is open for business, no new taxes, customer service is job one, and the war on the car is over.

Like it or not, Mayor Ford heard Torontonians loud and clear and the S.S. Toronto has set sail on a new course.

Your city government is about to change.

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