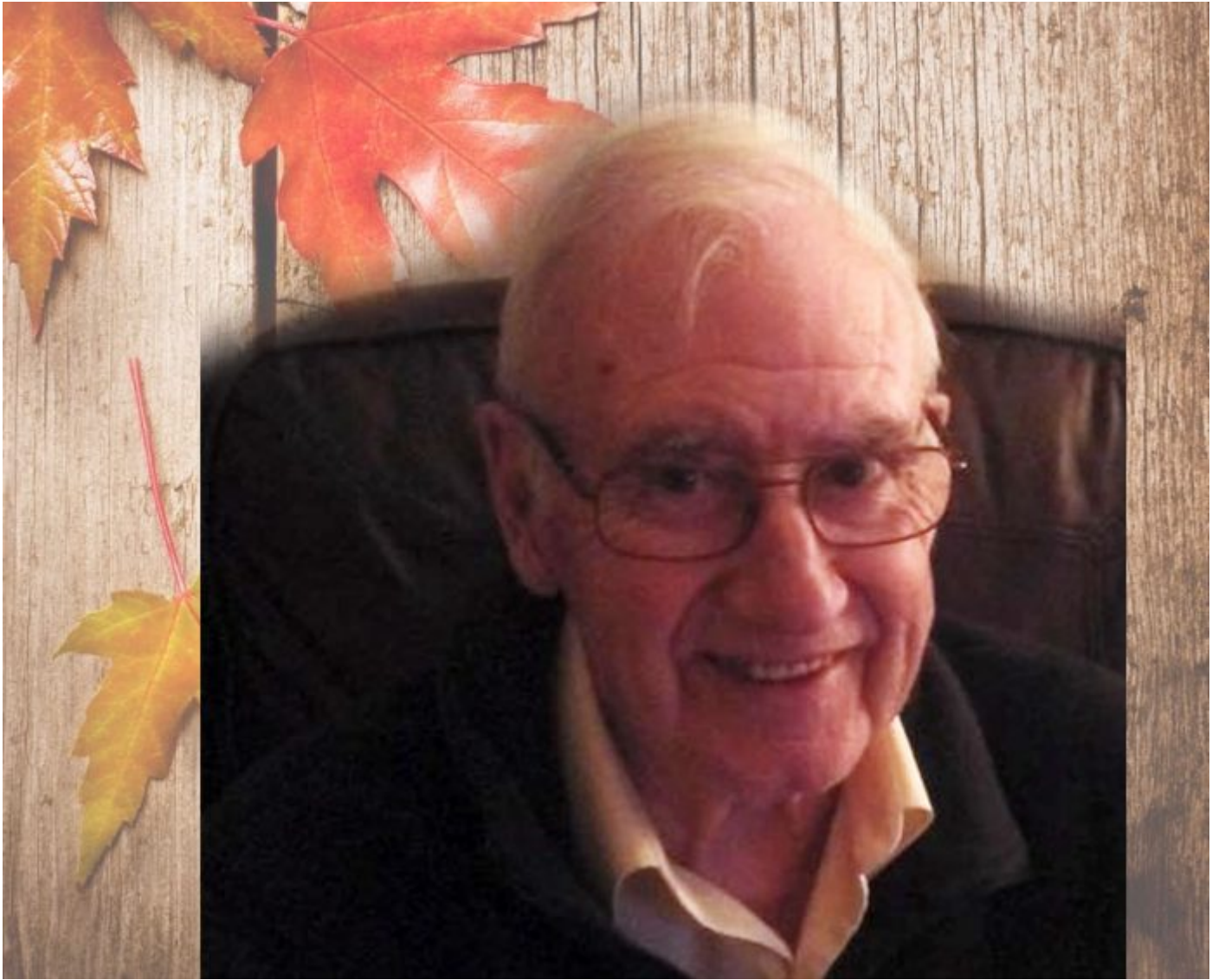


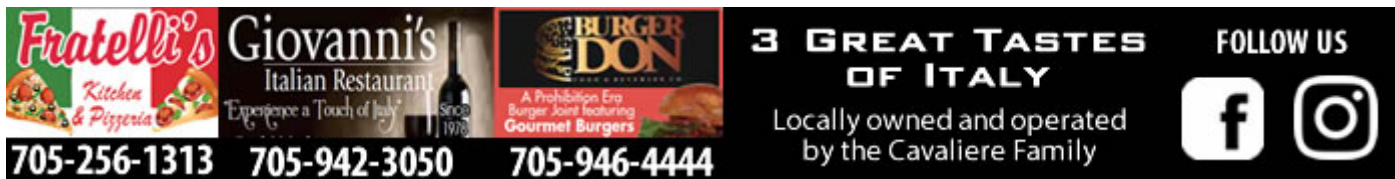
Doug Millroy: No room for Ross Romano

By **Doug Millroy** - March 17, 2018



Partisan politics should be thrown aside in this country's fight against the tariffs being imposed by U.S. President Donald Trump, but apparently that is not the case in Sault Ste. Marie.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau was in the city on Wednesday and led a roundtable with area leaders and stakeholders to discuss steel industry concerns.



There was, it turns out, no room for Ross Romano, who just happens to represent this city as a Progressive Conservative in the Ontario Legislature, not only at the table but in the room.

Romano said when he first heard that the prime minister was going to be in the Sault his family was with him in Toronto for his March break but he arranged to fly back to the Sault for the roundtable, which he fully expected to attend.

He said he contact the office of Terry Sheehan, our MP who happens to be a Liberal, to ask for the details.

"We were told that we would be advised and on Tuesday we called again and were told that the meeting had been moved to Wednesday and that nothing could be done, nothing could be changed. The schedule had been made and at that point it couldn't be changed."

I asked him what would have to be changed to allow for him being in the room and he said that was just relaying what he was told.

"They were well aware from last week that I was coming back for the purposes of being here for that event," he said. "It is unfortunate that I wasn't asked to be present. I thought that the gravity of the situation and the work that I had put in during the weeks before, both in the provincial legislature as well as working working with state senators on the tarrifs, would mean I should be there."

He said he would have liked to have attended, even if it were as a spectator.

As our MPP, he should have been there. As Coun. Frank Fata pointed out, Sudbury MPP Glenn Thibeault was there.

But then, he is a Liberal and this obviously was a Liberal event, a photo-op for the prime minister, in Fata's words.

Fata believes Trudeau's visit, part of a tour to assure four steeltowns that the government is working on their behalf, was a waste of time.

I think so too. We know the federal government is fighting the tariffs and surely any further information could have been done by a phone call to our mayor, Christian Provenzano, who could have passed on the information to the rest of us.

In regard to the attendance by Thibault, the mayor said it was his understanding that the Prime Minister's Office invited the Premier of Ontario and that the Premier sent Minister Thibeault as her delegate.

Sheehan himself confirmed that later in the day, saying in an email: "For all the stops to the Prime Minister's very successful cross country tour to support Steel and Aluminum workers, the Premier of the Province was invited to attend. For Sault Ste. Marie, Premier Wynne designated Cabinet Minister Glen Thibeault to represent the Province of Ontario. I will refer you to the Prime Minister's office if you have further questions."

Coun. Matthew Shoemaker, replying to the email Fata distributed to council in regard to Romano's exclusion from the roundtable, said as it was Sheehan's event, he could invite who he wants:

That is undoubtedly correct, but I think if you asked any Saultite, Liberal, PC or NDP, a majority would say our MPP of whatever political persuasion should have been there.

Local paramedics are asking for the public's support in their wage dispute with the city but, from where I sit, without revealing what they are asking the public to support.

Laurie Lessard-Brown, president of Uniforlocal paramedics Local 1359 who represents 54 paramedics in Sault Ste. Marie, was quoted in The Sault Star as saying the city's final offer was insulting.

"It is completely unacceptable and embarrassing that the City of Sault Ste. Marie is showing such disrespect to first responders who save lives every day," she said.

The city's offer calls for a 1.5 per cent increase in the first year with 0.5 increases in year two and three. The first year increase includes a base pay increase, introduction of shift premiums and paid meal breaks.

Lessard-Brown told The Star the increases proposed by the city would keep the local paramedics paid lower than others across the province for the same work. She said paramedics in Thunder Bay received wage increases of 2 per cent, 2.6 per cent and 2.65 per cent in their three-year negotiated contract.

This, I thought, was where the local paramedics should have told The Star what they were seeking in the way of wage increases so we, the people who will be paying for them, would have something on which to judge the merits.

But as they didn't offer and I gather The Star didn't ask, I thought I would.

"What do paramedics in the Sault make in wages. I have been told \$34 an hour, \$74,000 a year.

"Is this the starting wage or top wage. If it is not the starting wage, what is the starting wage?

"When you are asking for parity, are you asking for parity for cities in the north or in the south as well?

"What is the wage in percentage or actual dollars that you are asking for?

"Do you know what paramedics in Thunder Bay, North Bay, Sudbury and Timmins make? I note you mention the increases paramedics in Thunder Bay got but not what paramedics there made before they got the increases."

This was the main thrust of the questions I put to Lessard-Brown in an email to prevent further telephone tag. I didn't receive a reply.

The union was passing out leaflets at a Soo Greyhounds game a couple of weeks back, asking for the public to support them by calling their city councillors, who were listed on the sheet.

They pointed out they:

“Respond to emergent and non-emergent calls – from cardiac arrests to nursing home transfers;

“Attend more calls per ambulance than any service in Northern Ontario;

“Have been working without a labour contract for nearly one year”.

In regard to their claim about attending more calls per ambulance than any service in Northern Ontario, it would have given us a clearer picture if they had provided some numbers to back up their claim.

In regard to their working without a labour contract for a year, join the club. The city’s firefighters have been working without one for four years.

In regard to non-emergent calls, maybe the city could look elsewhere for this. After all, there are companies that handle such transfers as they don’t require the expertise of a paramedic. Maybe something could be set up here, possibly through a cab company willing to expand into this field.

The union claims the city is prioritizing budgets over the needs of the community.

Well, the public does expect the city to attempt to control costs, but I will admit the city does seem more than a little chintzy in what it is offering the paramedics in the way of increases.

However, some may disagree as they make, according to Al Horsman, chief administrative officer of the city, \$37.14 an hour, \$77,251 a year.

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