

## COLUMNISTS


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## Henderson: Brister versus Hudak



Tim Hudak, left, and Dave Brister at EPG Electric in Windsor on Friday, September 21, 2012. (TYLER BROWNBRIDGE / The Windsor Star)

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**Gord Henderson**  
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Remember the Titanic. That would be sound advice for Captain Timmy Hudak as the bullheaded PC skipper orders his porous vessel full-steam ahead.

The RMS Titanic captain at least listened to his spotters and made feverish last-minute efforts to avoid the iceberg looming in the darkness. Hudak, on the other hand, dismissed his most alert lookout, Dave Brister, for having the temerity to see disaster in proposed right-to-work legislation and sound the alarm.

Instead of heeding that warning, Hudak ordered the messenger shot to remind a potentially mutinous Tory crew that there'll be no changing course and, by the way, all lifeboats have been pitched overboard.

Brister, a news junkie who hits the exercise bike for an hour every morning while watching CNBC, came across as both resigned to his fate and a bit disappointed at how it was handled, in an interview a week after his political execution.

His political career has been spiked, for now, but he can look in the mirror and say he did the right thing in warning that right-to-work legislation is a "poison pill" that will kill whatever hope the party had of forming a majority government.

The end came a week ago Tuesday when two party flunkies from Toronto, not at all happy with having to drive down to the boonies in the dead of winter, showed up at his door and issued an ultimatum. He could recant and retain his position or refuse and pack it in as the Essex candidate.

Anyone who knows the 53-year-old former Windsor councillor, a guy who carves his own sometimes prickly trail, would understand that eating his words, cravenly backtracking on his Twitter comments, was not in the cards.

"If I'm going to say it to you in person, I'll put it on paper," said a defiant Brister in explaining why he went public and why he let his online words stand.

"This was no overnight deal. This was no bomb dropped on their heads. Everybody at (party) headquarters knew my position on this." Brister said he's had talks with the party's labour critic for at least a year and buttonholed Hudak about it following an emergency meeting in Leamington on the Heinz closing announcement. He ran into a brick wall.

The bottom line, said Brister, is that right-to-work is a dud. The overwhelming message at the door is that people want no part of what they see as an extreme, right-wing ideological measure. It's a deal-killer with voters across the spectrum.

The sad thing, he said, is that the party has constructive policy measures that could help turn around the Ontario economy but it's killing its electoral chances with this one corrosive issue.

"It's a non-starter just about everywhere in this province. People across the board are saying 'we can't vote for your party,'" said Brister.

He said his feelings about right-to-work are shared by a large number of Tory MPPs and candidates. "This is very widespread. I'm not the loudest. I'm just the first to come out and say this. Sometimes you've got to step out on a ledge and say this is wrong." He expects others will come forward eventually.

"I tried until I'm blue in the face to work within the system. But they don't want to hear it."

The problem, said Brister, is that Hudak is "insulated" by a small group of leadership operatives who won't let on-the-ground reality impact decisions.

"To this point they are absolutely intolerant of any view except that developed by four or five twenty-somethings who live in downtown Toronto. It's such an insider approach and it's going to cause them to fail." Those ideology-driven kids, he said, can't begin to grasp what candidates are hearing on the doorstep.

One thing he's heard loudly and clearly over the last three years is that voters are sick of politicians who meekly follow the party line. "Party loyalty trumps loyalty to the people we're supposed to represent. I believe that elected officials have to have the ability to stand up for what they believe in when it's contrary to party policies."

That's heresy, of course, in a political world run by unelected insiders who believe the political pawns should "be quiet or be gone."

Brister, who scoffs at the preposterous idea that he might run for Windsor mayor, is disappointed at the way this was handled but won't lose sleep over it.

"It is what it is. I accept it and life goes on. I've got a full life, great marriage, great kids."

Not to mention a good job as business development manager with South Essex Fabricating and Nature Fresh Farms, the largest independent produce grower in Canada.

It beats having a berth on the Titanic.

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**Tags:** [Dave Brister](#), [PC Party](#), [Tim Hudak](#)