



NEWS RELEASE

Ted Arnott, MPP
Wellington - Halton Hills

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Former MPP Jack Johnson remembered at Queen's Park

(Queen's Park) – Public servant. Mentor. Honest. Champion. Friend. This was how the late John McLellan “Jack” Johnson, former MPP for Wellington-Dufferin-Peel, was remembered this week in the Ontario Legislature.

Jack Johnson served his constituents in that legislature from 1975 to 1990, and passed away in June of last year. The people he represented were, by all accounts, extremely fortunate to have what Liberal minister Jim Bradley called “the ultimate constituency person.”

“He was an individual who saw no problem as being too small a problem for his constituents to bring that problem to Queen's Park,” said Mr. Bradley of his former Progressive Conservative colleague.

“Jack was, indeed, a strong Conservative,” Mr. Bradley continued. “He was very loyal to his party, but he always understood the viewpoints of others in the House, whether they were from the left, centre or right, and he respected very much his colleagues in the House.”

Mr. Bradley's remarks echoed those of New Democrat MPP Gilles Bisson.

“He was one of those rare individual politicians who happen to come along and understand that, at the end of the day, it's not just about serving your constituents but sometimes being civil to each other,” offered Mr. Bisson.

Long-serving MPPs Norm Sterling and Ted Arnott remembered Mr. Johnson's tireless work for his community, as well as his character and friendship.

“He was a great man for all of us,” recalled Mr. Sterling.

“He was very much my mentor,” said Mr. Arnott. “[He was] a real political hero for the man who he was, and the way he approached his responsibilities.”

Mr. Arnott concluded his remarks with a call to serve.

“As we gather today to celebrate and give thanks for Jack's outstanding service, we resolve to ensure that the timeless values of integrity, commitment, family and community—all the things he believed in and all things he represented—will be carried on by the service we can render to others in his memory.”

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Attached: Ontario Hansard

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JACK JOHNSON

Hon. Monique M. Smith: I believe we have unanimous consent that up to five minutes be allotted to each party to speak in remembrance of the late John McLellan “Jack” Johnson.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Agreed? Agreed.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: On behalf of the New Democratic caucus and our leader, Andrea Horwath, I want to rise and say a few words today in the Legislature in regard to Jack Johnson.

First elected to this place in 1975, Mr. Johnson, from what I know from reading in preparation for this statement, was a person who had served in the local level of government for some years. He was known as a pretty honest, hard-working kind of guy, but what he was known for was as a guy with a big heart.

He was one of those rare individual politicians who happen to come along and understand that at the end of the day it's not just about serving your constituents but sometimes being civil to each other. In this place, if you've been here around question period, you will see that sometimes we forget that as a lesson.

One of the things I saw as I was preparing was that he was one of those fellows who wore his heart on his sleeve to a certain extent. The politics he brought to this Legislature were those of a hard-working MPP but somebody who also basically took things from the perspective of knowing that at the end of the day we're all human beings. We all come here with our own reasons, but at the end of the day we need to respect each other. I think that's something that not only served him well but something I think we can all learn from.

He is one of those rare individuals who, yes, came here on a bit of a sweep with Conservatives at one point, when the Conservatives were in power for so many years at the time. But when the sweep went the other way, and as the tide went down, his boat was still floating, as we say. He remained in the Legislature beyond the time of the Conservatives being in government. When the fortunes were not so good for the Conservative Party, Mr. Johnson was able to hold on to his seat and remain in this Legislature for some 15 years.

One of the reasons was, as I read it—and I understand this, because it's something like—I don't want to say I'm anything like him or he was anything like me; that's not my point. He understood that politics was local. What he was trying to do was get people to remember that decisions made here at Queen's Park sometimes aren't necessarily the right decisions for people back home. He always tried to bring some way of being able to make the point that we needed to get decisions to be more in line with what was happening back home. He was known as a bit of a crusader when it came to that particular brand of politics, of making sure we don't get caught up in the machinations of what happens in cabinet, the machinations of what happens in a caucus or even what happens in the Legislature, but that we understand in the end that what we need is to have decisions that reflect the values of where we come from and protect those interests of the people we represent. That is something I understand quite well and probably one of the reasons that served him very well as well.

The other thing is that he was a Conservative in the way that—we expect Conservatives to be friendly to business and see that as an important issue, but he was from the perspective of small business. He understood the family farm and those people who work hard in our communities, running individual businesses. The moms and pops, as we know them today and as we knew them back then, are the people who truly are the sort of unsung heroes of the economy, and they need to have champions in this Legislature. I understand that well, because Mr. Johnson was right: These people work hard, they're honest, they do everything they can to succeed, and whatever little money they make in their ventures,

either on the family farm or in their local businesses, is money that's spun back into the local economy. He was known as a champion for those individuals because he understood, as others probably do, that at the end of the day the big guys got the bucks, they got the lawyers, they got the consultants. They have all the stuff they need to survive. What people need at the family farm level, and what people need in small business, is some champions not only in this Legislature but outside, to be able to make sure their issues are heard and that at the end of the day they're able to also have an impact when it comes to public policy. That's something he believed in very, very much.

He was a family man, and unfortunately, in that time of politics it was different. We didn't have the constituency offices that we have today; we didn't have the type of support that we have as members. He had to do a lot of the work himself and with his wife, Marnie, who has passed away, be able to represent the work that he did here at Queen's Park back into the constituency. It meant that it took a certain toll on his family. We all know, as members of the Legislature, that although it's a really great calling to get involved in public office, for those of us who are lucky enough to be elected once and then re-elected a number of times, it's going to take a toll on the family. Certainly that was the case with Mr. Johnson, because he had a number of children who saw him from afar at times and would rather have had him come to their events that they had back home and to be part of the decisions and the experience that it is to have a family. Mr. Johnson, unfortunately, at times had to be away because of the way the Legislative calendar was back then, away from his family with less of an ability to get back home, as much as he would want to. We have here in the gallery—oh, my God, all of you are here, the entire family. The entire community is here for Mr. Johnson.

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I just want to say, on behalf of New Democrats and Madam Andrea Horwath, the leader of the New Democratic Party, we'd like to welcome Reverend Colin Johnson, who is here—if you would stand?—along with his other son, Paul Johnson; the daughter, Sheri Johnson; and their extended family. They're here in order to celebrate with us his time in the Legislature.

We say to you, as members of this assembly: Thank you for having lent us your father, your friend, your community friend and member. We thank you for the time he was here, we salute the work that he has done, and we salute you. Thank you.

Hon. James J. Bradley: I'm deeply honoured to be able to pay tribute to Jack Johnson.

When you're doing so, the research people always provide you with information on all the different committees he happened to sit on, when he was elected and when he wasn't. Well, to me, with Jack Johnson, that's—I won't say it's irrelevant, but it's much more personal with Jack because he and I were extremely good friends in the House.

He brought a different demeanour to politics that I think we could all emulate with some satisfaction, and we'd be viewed by the general public in a different way were we to follow Jack Johnson's manner in which he carried out his responsibilities as a member of provincial Parliament. He reminds me a bit of another person from southwestern Ontario, if I can call that southwestern Ontario appropriately, and that's Hugh Edighoffer, because both of them were haberdashers. Both of them owned menswear shops in the communities from which they came and both, again, were very popular with members of the House. If you sat on a committee with Jack Johnson, you sat on the committee with a friend, and you had a lot of chats, not just about the material that was before the committee but a lot of other things.

Jack was, indeed, a strong Conservative. To say that he was a red Tory or another kind of Tory—Jack was a Progressive Conservative. He was very loyal to his party, but he always understood the viewpoints of others in the House, whether they were from the left, centre or right, and he respected very much his

colleagues in the House. He taught one person in this House extremely well, and I'll break the rule the Speaker has set, if you allow me to, to say Ted Arnott is the person—I'm going to break the rule and use his name, the member for Waterloo—

Mr. Ted Arnott: Wellington—Halton Hills.

Hon. James J. Bradley: Yes, Wellington—Halton Hills, now. Because Ted Johnson is—Ted Johnson. I almost put it that way. That's how close they are. He actually worked for Jack, as some of you will know, and it's easy to say "Ted Johnson" because they are almost precisely the same. One of the nicest personalities you will find in this House today is Ted Arnott. One of the nicest personalities you would find in the days of Jack Johnson was Jack Johnson himself, of course.

It showed in the family. I've had the opportunity to meet certain members of the family in certain capacities: the president of the Ontario Good Roads Association, and I know there is an archbishop there as well. So the family has gone on, and I know he'd appreciate each and every one of the children, the grandchildren and perhaps the great-grandchildren, brothers and sisters and so on.

They can be justifiably proud, because Jack was the ultimate constituency person. He was an individual who saw no problem as being too small a problem for his constituents to bring that problem to Queen's Park: directly to Premier Davis at the time if he felt it was necessary, but certainly to the committees of the Legislature, to the House as a whole and to individual colleagues who were members of the cabinet at the time.

People write different columns about the demeanour in politics. We've seen this federally and provincially, and we see it in the United States. Jack came from an era where there was much more collegiality that took place within partisan politics than is the case today. That's something we can't roll back, but it is something we can look back upon with a good deal of envy. But it comes from the personality of the individual. It comes from the upbringing of the individual. The family has been involved, as Jack was, and not just in politics, because he was involved in politics at the local level and then at the provincial level. By the way, he never decided to go to the national level because all of us in this House know that the provincial level of government—the provincial representatives—are much closer to the day-to-day challenges, problems and opportunities that people have than the people who serve at the federal level. I'm not being disrespectful of them, but I think we recognize this in this House.

It was with much regret that I learned of his passing. I know that my friend who's in the riding where Jack resided knocked on his door during the campaign and was greeted very nicely. Even though he was a Liberal, he was greeted nicely and given much advice by Jack Johnson on that occasion. He was not afraid to give his advice on many issues.

I want to thank the family for sharing Jack with us for so many years in this Legislature. Ontario is a better place because he was in this House, his constituency is a better place and politics has a better name because Jack Johnson was part of that political scene.

Mr. Ted Arnott: Jack Johnson once told me that during his time at Queen's Park he often wondered whether he deserved to be here. While Jack may have had his personal doubts, which were really just an extension of his characteristic modesty and decency, his constituents had no doubts whatsoever about the man who voiced their hopes and views in this place from 1975 to 1990. In fact, his constituents loved him.

It was hard not to love Jack Johnson, for his heart was as big as it was good. Jack's spirit left this earth about 15 months ago, but today we remember Jack Johnson, the elected public servant who served his people well.

He was a public servant, yes, but also a tireless and hard-working politician. In fact, he liked to tell a story about one of his election campaigns when he attended a record 16 events in one day in his huge, sprawling riding of Wellington–Dufferin–Peel. Unfortunately, in order to make those 16 events, he also received three speeding tickets that same day—no doubt, another personal best, one that he was somewhat less likely to mention.

I consider myself very, very fortunate to have had the chance to work with Jack, first as a volunteer in his last two election campaigns, in 1985 and 1987, and later as his assistant, working in his constituency office from 1987 until he retired three years later. Those years working with Jack were formative ones that I'll never, ever forget.

Warren Buffett recently wrote in tribute to his late friend and mentor Benjamin Graham, "More than any other man except my father, he influenced my life." I could easily say the same of Jack, but in my case it's perhaps an understatement. He was very much my mentor, a real political hero for the man that he was and the way he approached his responsibilities. He was as good of a friend as I've ever had.

Just as the Great Depression was beginning to tighten its grip in 1930, John McLellan Johnson was born in Detroit, Michigan, where his father had found work. But before long, the young family had moved back home to Mount Forest, where Jack and his twin brother, Dan, grew up. After high school, Jack studied business at Ryerson in Toronto. Upon graduation, he founded Johnson's Menswear, which became a fixture on Main Street of Mount Forest for the next 30 years.

In 1951, he married the love his life, Marnie Johnston. They were very much partners in business as well as life, working side by side as their business grew and prospered. Marnie supported him in every way. They were inseparable. In every sense, they were a team.

Through the early years of their marriage, there were likely many ups and downs, but they were blessed with three children: Colin, Paul and Sheri. The growing family moved to their beautiful 19th-century Victorian home on Queen Street in Mount Forest.

Always an outgoing optimist, Jack firmly believed that you needed to get involved in your community to make it better. Leadership on the local school board, in his church, the chamber of commerce and the Lions Club were all integral to Jack's civic participation as he fulfilled this obligation to his community.

That obligation, however, brought Jack and Marnie a great deal of personal satisfaction. In fact, they both loved it. Always interested in government and politics, he was elected to town council, later becoming mayor of Mount Forest, and he focused his efforts on industrial development and growth. Through his leadership, numerous manufacturing businesses were enticed to set up operations in Mount Forest, creating literally hundreds of jobs in town.

Then, upon the retirement of long-time and well-respected MPP John Root in 1975, Jack was persuaded to seek the PC nomination in Wellington–Dufferin–Peel to succeed him.

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Regional government was, as Jack saw it, the major issue in that election. In fact, the basis of his campaign was to oppose his own party, which at the time was promoting the extension of regional government. Jack stood fast by his beliefs, refusing to accept the party line on regional government, and demonstrated the courage and conviction that became his hallmark in the communities he served in the Legislature through 15 years as an MPP.

In this place, what goes around comes around, as we know. Jack respected everyone in this House, and in return was liked and respected by members of all three parties.

He once told me that when he was first elected as an MPP, he considered himself to be relatively right-wing. But as we all know, these kinds of labels have their limitations. His views evolved to include strong support for a minimum wage that workers could live on. He supported training and help for those in poverty, and better services for seniors, the disabled and veterans, among other priorities. He came to believe and proudly asserted that he was a fiscal conservative with a social conscience.

That social conscience led to him to one of his proudest accomplishments when he pushed the government to retrofit multi-storey seniors' residences with elevators—elevators that he thought should have been included in the original design of the buildings. Jack was appalled when he learned that a constituent in Hillsburgh who had fallen and broken her hip couldn't return home to her seniors' apartment to recuperate because she lived on the second floor of a building that had no elevator. Jack raised the issue repeatedly and persistently in the House, motivated not by the desire to gain political credit but only to convince the government to get the elevators installed and fix the problem. Finally, after much advocacy, the government listened and set aside the money to meet this need. Not surprisingly, Jack didn't take public credit for himself, but instead took private satisfaction that his efforts made a big difference. That was Jack Johnson.

He also believed in the concept of local autonomy, as he called it. The province, he believed, must respect local councils as mature governments in their own right. He always fought hard to help the local governments in his riding, rightly reasoning if he could help a council he would be helping an entire community.

Within our caucus, he was the longest-serving chair of caucus in memory, serving in this capacity for nine years straight. He disliked having to cut off his more long-winded colleagues, but he did so when necessary, as a good chair must, to keep the agenda flowing. He served on many legislative committees and enjoyed that aspect of the job very much, especially during the minority government of 1977 to 1981. This was, he told me, the most meaningful Legislature in which he had served. In those years, he remarked, people worked together across party lines, when there was a degree of personal respect demonstrated across the aisle in the House and consensus ruled instead of confrontation. Imagine that.

In retirement after 1990, Jack was appointed to the Canada Pension Plan appeal board and later the Alcohol and Gaming Commission. On another occasion he was appointed to a committee to help displaced workers who were laid off after a large plant closure in Mount Forest.

He was always in demand as an informal political consultant, which meant that almost every aspiring politician in our area, including John Wilkinson, would want to go to seek his advice, which he offered generously to all comers, irrespective of their political stripe. I benefited from that advice through the years too, and to this day when I'm working with my staff, I often preface my instructions with, "Jack Johnson would have done it this way."

He always told me to be my own man, not beholden or defined by my party leader. "Party leaders come and go," he would say. "Never make election promises you can't keep. Promise only your best efforts if re-elected." Good advice for all of us. "Don't get too excited when you receive a call from party headquarters during an election campaign. If you ignore them, they usually go away." And, "Every member should take a weekend off a month to spend with his or her family," more good advice that I haven't always been able to follow.

Today, we are joined in the House by some of the Johnson family, some of his former staff, as well as some of Jack's and Marnie's closest friends. We all miss them both and think of them often. As we

gather today to celebrate and give thanks for Jack's outstanding service, we resolve to ensure that the timeless values of integrity, commitment, family and community—all the things he believed in and all things he represented—will be carried on by the service we can render to others in his memory.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member for Carleton–Mississippi Mills would like a word.

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: As Jack was a very, very close friend of mine during my period in the 1980s and the 1970s, I just wanted to say to his family—thank you to his friends. I see Bill Moody, his former campaign manager, up there. Jack and Bill gave me a call at 1 o'clock in the morning after the 1987 election, when there were 16 PC members re-elected, Jack being one and me being one. They were celebrating at that point in time, very much, and wanted me to be part of it.

I can never forget Premier Davis coming into caucus down the hall here when we were in the government in the early 1980s and saying that there were two members of caucus who served their constituents better than any of the other members of the caucus, and they were Jack Johnson and Ron McNeil from Elgin. He based that upon the numbers of correspondence, the letters that these two members had written to him and to ministers, and the degree of interest they had in their constituents.

I must say, too, just because of his character, and because of the way he conducted himself when I was serving as a minister in Mr. Davis's government, when Jack asked you to do something he would always preface it and say, "Norm, if you can't do anything, I fully understand. But can you really try for this? Because this constituent was really in need." I have to say to everybody in this Legislature that when somebody comes to you and asks you like that and has the character and the integrity that Jack Johnson did, it's very difficult for a minister to say no. He was so successful because of his genuine interest in his constituency. Marnie, his wife, was a tremendous partner, and she was a dear friend of mine as well. I miss them both very much.

Lastly, I'd like to say to all members of the Legislature that I have never seen a more cohesive pair than Jack Johnson and Ted Arnott. I thought it was strange that Jim called Ted "Ted Johnson." The way Ted has cared for Jack in retirement and Jack cared for Ted—it was like father and son in terms of their relationship. Ted, I want to thank you for your care for my good friend and our good friend. I know that all the people up there know of your close association and the help you gave Jack when he retired from this place because he missed it so much. Ted, you did a great job for Jack, and Jack did a great job for you. I know you both loved each other. I will miss him every day that I think about him and I keep talking about him.

Thank you very much to his friends and family. He was a great man for all of us.