

The Liversidge e-Letter

An Executive Briefing on Emerging Workplace Safety and Insurance Issues

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An Electronic Letter for the Clients of L.A. Liversidge, LL.B.

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Elizabeth Witmer nominated as WSIB Chair

As solid an appointment as could be made!

Premier nominates Elizabeth Witmer as Chair of the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board

Almost six (6) years ago to the day, in the April 28, 2006 issue of **The Liversidge e-Letter**, I announced that the government had proposed Steve Mahoney as Chair of the WSIB. Less than two weeks ago, on April 16, under the headline **The Mahoney Legacy: Honesty; Commitment; Passion; Openness**, I detailed my personal impressions and thoughts of Steve Mahoney's outstanding term as WSIB Chair. Now, just a few days later, I am pleased to report on the announced nomination of **Elizabeth Witmer as WSIB Chair**. The headline of the **Mahoney Legacy** is so easily applied to the expectations of the incoming Chair. Not one word need be changed.

In her no doubt difficult but exciting announcement today, Elizabeth Witmer said, "*This has been an extremely difficult decision to make but I believe it is the right decision for me at this juncture in my life and career.*"

Elizabeth Witmer gets things done

As a senior cabinet minister and Deputy Premier throughout 1995 to 2003, Witmer managed some of the toughest portfolios at Queen's Park under Premiers Mike Harris and Ernie Eves. "*A highlight of my career has been to serve the people of Ontario as Deputy Premier, Minister of Labour, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care, Minister of Environment and Minister of Education,*" Witmer said.

It is based on my observations when she served as labour critic in the early 1990s, as Minister of Labour in the mid to late 1990s, and again as labour critic eight years ago, that I can unabashedly proclaim, with no hesitation, that the stewardship of the WSIB Chair's office rests in qualified and capable hands. And, that is a *massive* understatement.

Unquestionably, throughout her career, Elizabeth gained the respect of all parties and stakeholders for her ability to get the job done in a collaborative and decisive manner.

Immediately before the PCs formed the government in June, 1995, as PC Labour Critic, Elizabeth spoke to an L.A. Liversidge client town hall meeting (just as the then Liberal Labour Critic Steve Mahoney had done a few weeks before). In the April 3, 1995 issue of **The Liversidge FaxLine** (the predecessor to **The Liversidge e-Letter**), **A Report of Our Meeting with Elizabeth Witmer**, a strong commitment to sound, responsible and engaged reform resonated.

A few months later, after an election win and **appointment as Minister of Labour**, Elizabeth was able to transform those words into action. And, act she did. As a political first in Ontario, as Minister, at the very *beginning* of the government's mandate, she set out to reform Ontario's workers' compensation system. After the bold and unique appointment of a **Minister Without Portfolio Responsible for Workers' Compensation Reform**, she led an aggressive legislative agenda of reform with the introduction of **Bill 99**. Yet, while well aware of the core issues having "worked the file" for five (5) years before becoming Minister, public consultation and openness was priority one from the get go. Full public hearings, triggering a full and robust *public* debate was part and parcel of the Witmer method. In my respectful view, this was, and is, the archetypical way to responsibly deliver public policy change, especially on the WSI file.

As Elizabeth is set to assume another mantle in the same impressive and progressive career, many of the issues she will soon face again will be familiar to her. Since the release of the **2009 Report of the Auditor General**, the stage has been set for another phase of aggressive change. The **Arthurs' Funding Review Report** will soon be released, and will be the official "starters' pistol" for the next few chapters of change. The stakes are high. The risks are volatile. The only greater risk is not doing anything. With Elizabeth Witmer as WSIB Chair, that is no risk at all.