

If Ontario's Progressive Conservatives were a married couple, they would seek counselling. They have a new leader and ambitions to win an election in two years, but just can't seem to get along with each other. Their differences have been shown not in verbal denunciations that win headlines # the Tories have avoided these # but, more importantly, in votes in the legislature.

Premier Dalton McGuinty's Liberal government has secured approval for landmark legislation giving the province and municipalities powers to designate, regulate and prevent demolition of heritage properties.

Twelve Conservative MPPs including heavyweights former interim leader Bob Runciman and former deputy premier Elizabeth Witmer voted for it.

Six Tories including another former deputy premier, Jim Flaherty, and Norm Sterling, a senior MPP and a minister as long ago as the early 1980s, voted against.

Witmer said it builds on and improves earlier Conservative legislation, but Sterling said he could not support taking away owners' rights to use their properties as they see fit without compensation.

The Liberal government obtained approval of a law through which it will try to cling to some role in censoring movies after the Ontario Superior Court ruled it has no broad power to censor.

It will classify all movies, so consumers and particularly parents will have guidance on their content, and disapprove adult sex movies it feels violate the Criminal Code and tip off police.

Conservative leader John Tory and eight of his MPPs including Witmer and former house leader John Baird supported it, but eight Conservatives including Flaherty and Runciman voted against. Conservatives who endorsed the legislation praised it for at least trying to hang on to some censorship, but Flaherty, a former attorney general, said the Liberals are timid in accepting a ruling by one judge and should appeal as high as they can.

The Liberals brought in legislation that allows diners to take their own wine into restaurants that accept the practice and drink it with meals.

Thirteen Conservatives voted against it, but Sterling, Norman Miller and John Yakabuski, voted for it.

Miller and Yakabuski said they did not have much of a problem with the legislation, but most Conservatives argued strongly against, saying the Liberals are merely trying to divert attention from real concerns and restaurants will have less control over how much customers drink, but still be legally liable for problems they cause.

The Liberals made Ontario the first province to have a law aimed at banning pit bull terriers, which have caused horrific injuries.

Most Conservatives voted against, arguing legislation should focus on all dangerous dogs and not a single breed, but Sterling voted for, another instance of being out of step with his party.

But Sterling has long been noted for his independence, including being the only senior Conservative to warn Tory premier William Davis was being a dictator and could cost his party an election by extending full funding to Catholic high schools in the 1980s # such prescience and outspokenness are worth keeping.

The Conservatives have shown they are divided over allowing same-sex marriage. The Liberals brought in a law to facilitate the marriage ceremony, which is under provincial

jurisdiction, and Tory expressed support, but some of his MPPs said they disapprove. The Conservatives have split even on minor issues including whether the legislature should sit nights, with some voting for and some against.

The Conservatives can be forgiven some splits. They are a party in transition from the far-right policies of former premier Mike Harris, perpetuated to some degree by his successor, Ernie Eves, to the more moderate stances of new leader. They have not yet got all their policies sorted out.

But parties normally make more effort to debate their differences in private and resolve or bury them and go public with policies that make them seem united.

The Conservatives have some strengths, but voters are bound to wonder if a party can run a province when it can't get its own act together.

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