

CPO Kelusky retires amidst widespread praise

Don Wall July 29, 2021



FILE PHOTO — Former Minister of Labour Kevin Flynn (left) introduced new provincial Chief Prevention Officer (CPO) Ron Kelusky at Queen’s Park March 7, 2018. Since then, Kelusky has made several strides trying to improve health and safety in construction and other sectors. He wrapped up his final active week in the CPO’s office July 23 as he is retiring.

Ontario’s Chief Prevention Officer (CPO) Ron Kelusky wrapped up his final active week in the CPO’s office July 23 as colleagues from across the construction sector offered best wishes and full respect for his leadership, poise and talent.

In late March Kelusky told Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development (MLTSD) Monte McNaughton he intended to retire at the end of September, upon his 65th birthday, ending his three-and-a-half-year tenure in the position.

He had submitted a five-year strategic health and safety plan for the province on July 16, and said in an interview he felt he got a lot accomplished and it had been a great run but “it’s time to let the reins go to the next person.”

Construction stakeholders heaped praise on him as he prepared to leave.

“The construction sector is better for having Ron Kelusky as the Chief Prevention Officer since he transformed what the role meant,” said Giovanni Cautillo, president of the Ontario General Contractors Association (OGCA). “His level of stakeholder engagement was stratospheric.”

Sandro Perruzza, CEO of the Ontario Society of Professional Engineers, added, “Ron always focused on collaborating with partners to find better ways to reduce illnesses, injuries and fatalities in this province. He believed in people and empowered them to find the best solutions.”

Infrastructure Health and Safety Association president and CEO Enzo Garritano commented on Kelusky’s role during the pandemic.

“His leadership, availability, direction and tireless efforts during COVID to keep Ontario’s essential services safe are commendable,” said Garritano. “He will continue to have an impact on prevention going forward, so it is only fitting that the new OHS strategy has been released prior to his retirement.”

Ian Cunningham, president of the Council of Ontario Construction Associations (COCA), also recognized Kelusky’s leadership during the pandemic: “As a result of the work that Ron led and the guidance he and his team provided, Ontario’s workplaces were able to control the highly contagious and deadly virus effectively.”

The COVID prevention measures for the construction sector that the CPO’s office spearheaded required many partnerships, Kelusky said.

“Meeting with BILD, COCA, OGCA, RESCON, we met with them on a frequent basis just to share information and best practices. It really was a bottom-up approach, all ministries, from health, the chief medical officer of health, my colleagues over with the inspection unit.

“I’d have to say, this is a good example of how government can work collectively to be very responsive.”

Kelusky said he has had a pattern in his career of looking for new challenges every three or four years. He was most recently president and CEO of the Public Services Health and Safety Association when he was appointed to the CPO’s job in March 2018.

“If I had to look at all my jobs, this has been one of the most rewarding careers that I’ve had. And certainly the synergies that we’ve established, working with construction, working with the trades, working with the minister’s office, and we got the strategy out.

“We’ve worked so hard together, the staff, it’s been amazing.”

Besides dealing with the pandemic and publishing the strategic plan, Kelusky said co-ordinating the WSIB and MLTSD employers’ accreditation and incentive programs, supporting small business and boosting training were accomplishments he was most proud of.

“Not only did we train 100,000 people, that had a real demonstrable impact on reducing harm, injury and fatalities in the workplace, really moving in that direction. I think that focus on supporting our small businesses, and in the budget, we allocated \$10 million to help small businesses receive free health and safety training.”

The strategic plan is posted on the MLTSD website and features four pillars that include expanding collaboration on health and safety and obtaining better data and evidence on which to base decisions. The strategy constitutes a foundation upon which the next CPO and the broader health and safety sector in the province can build, he said.

Kelusky said the process for appointing his replacement is well underway. He will not be in his office regularly during his final weeks up to the end of September, taking accumulated vacation days. He had a full schedule the week of July 19, his final week in the office, including participating in a webinar sponsored by the OGCA where he acknowledged his upcoming retirement.

Kelusky said he would be around in future in case anyone wanted his opinion, but he does not plan to obtain new employment or start consulting. His daughter in Chicago is expecting a child and that would be a focus.

“I just want to mow my grass on a Tuesday.”