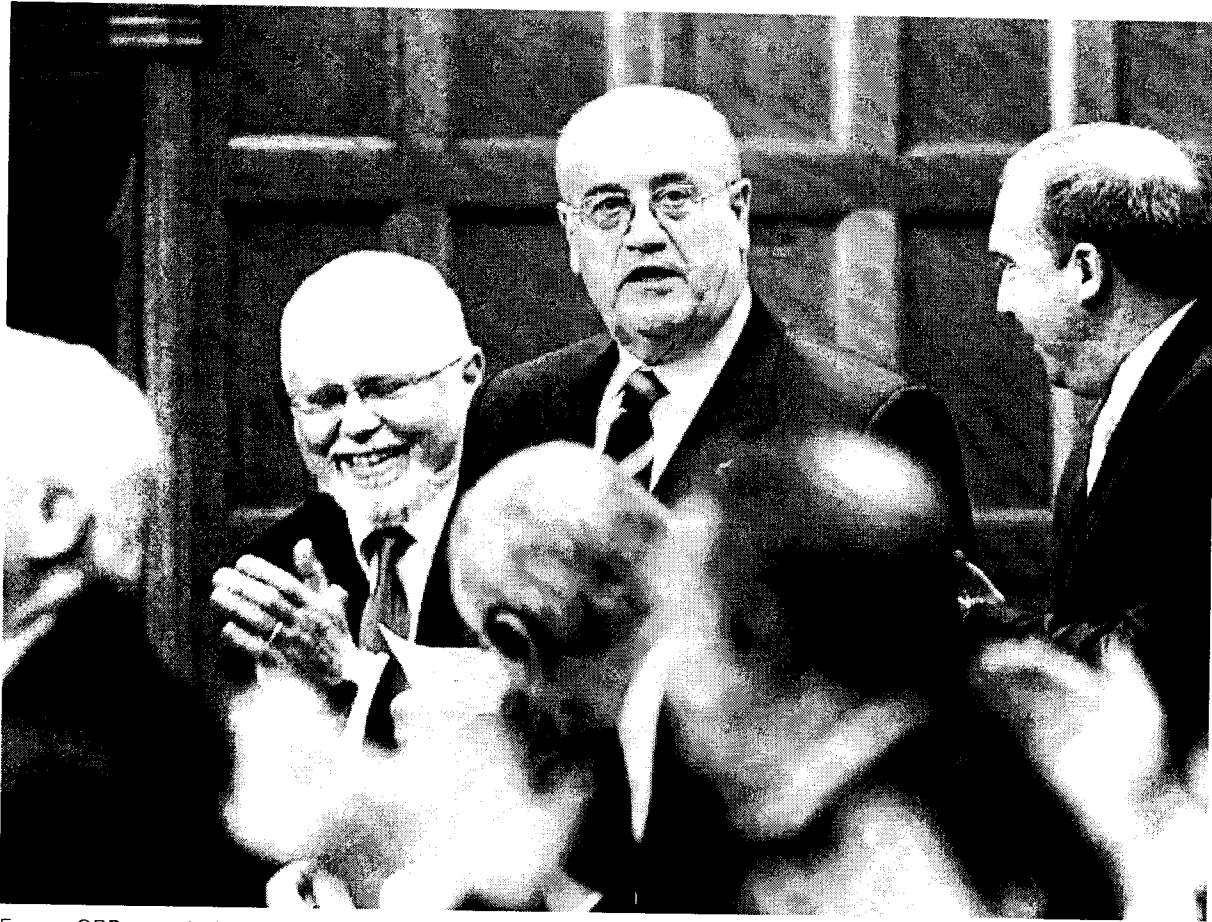


'Team player' Fantino vows to be voice for victims

BY MARK KENNEDY, POSTMEDIA NEWS DECEMBER 16, 2010

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Former OPP commissioner Julian Fantino receives a standing ovation in the House of Commons on Wednesday, his first day as an official MP. Before, Fantino said he wouldn't allow character attacks to stop him from helping victims of crime.

Photograph by: Chris Wattie, Reuters, Postmedia News

Julian Fantino officially became a Conservative MP Wednesday, promising to be a "voice" for victims of crime and to not be derailed by opposition attacks on his character.

Fantino, formerly the Ontario Provincial Police commissioner, won a byelection in Vaughan, north of Toronto, in late November. He was sworn in as an MP on Wednesday, and as tradition dictates, was escorted into the House of Commons by the prime minister.

Earlier in the day, in an exclusive interview with Postmedia News, Fantino spoke bluntly about the need for tough law-and-order policies and insisted he's not worried about how the opposition parties are gunning to bring him down.

"I think we tend to minimize the impact of crime," said Fantino, who enters politics after 40 years as a police officer.

"I have never had any tolerance whatsoever for crime, to begin with. And also, I have never been able to overlook the victimization that's involved. We can talk about statistics, we can banter around, we can

say it's up, it's down, it's sideways, but I've had to deal with real victims. I've had to deal with the real gnawing consequences: the trauma, the tragedy of crimes -- especially violent crime, at its very core."

Fantino said it's this direct experience on the front lines that gives him special insight into the criminal justice issues that are hotly debated in the House.

"So, I hope to also be a voice for victims, to bring forward their issues in a way that will resonate in the kinds of laws that this country needs to make in order to better balance the system of justice."

Fantino's arrival on Parliament Hill came amid recent warnings from opposition parties, particularly the Liberals, that he won't get an easy ride in politics. Fantino's critics accuse him of failing to publicly debate his opponents in the recent byelection campaign and of sitting on records which would show how much the OPP charged the taxpayers for security costs related to the G8 and G20 summits.

Moreover, Liberal MP Justin Trudeau has blasted Fantino for past comments which the Liberals say suggest Fantino opposes the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

On Wednesday, Liberal House leader David McGuinty said Fantino's past and future comments will be "examined closely" by the opposition.

"At the same time that I welcome him to the House, I would say that he's now in the big leagues," said McGuinty. "His record will now form part of his service as an MP. His comments made recently in respect to the Charter of Rights, with respect to law-and-order issues, these will all, of course, be subject to intense scrutiny."

McGuinty also suggested that Fantino, with a reputation for "independence," might have difficulty fitting into the Conservative caucus, "which is so strictly controlled by Mr. Harper."

But Fantino rejected that suggestion, dismissing speculation that he is bound for cabinet and insisting that he will be a "team player" no matter what Harper asks of him in caucus.

As for the Liberals' concern that he is anti-charter, Fantino said "that's absolute show business." He said critics are taking out of context things he wrote in his autobiography.

"The book speaks about the murders of police officers, and children and failings of the system," said Fantino. "The charter is not what the issue was all about. I think it's totally and absolutely inappropriate."

Still, he insisted his efforts to help advance criminal justice reforms won't be affected by the critics.

"We're moving forward. And people can try and deter, detract or otherwise derail me, but it's not going to happen."

Ultimately, he said, people will realize he has come to Ottawa to do "serious business" and to make a contribution to the country.

"I think all reasonable people will know who I am. They'll know where I stand on the issues," he said.

"They'll know that I am a values-driven, honest, ethical person. And those who choose to make mischief, it's not a novelty to me. I've had to encounter that throughout my career."

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