

Raftis confident in region future

Although Jack Raftis' chairmanship of Halton region has come under fire recently, primarily from Burlington councillors who object to his support for the region's sewer surcharge system, council recently affirmed their faith in his ability to do the job and he now faces another two years leading an administration discredited by bungled budgeting, and embittered by parochial voting among its councillors.

Despite problems such as the \$600,000 deficit discovered last summer and divisive debates on Halton's sewer surcharge system which have prompted "en bloc" opposition from Burlington's regional representatives, Mr. Raftis said in a recent interview with The Herald he is confident the region is being run in a "mature and stable" fashion.

The particularly shaking events at the region this past year, he said, act as a cement, binding the region's four area municipalities—Halton Hills, Milton, Oakville and Burlington—closer together.

"You have to consider what the region is faced with," he said. "We've got problems with landfill sites—where are we going to put all that garbage?—vandalism, the need of the health and social services committee to provide better care of an increasing number of seniors in the region and the need for more day care; it's only natural that in the eight years since the region was formed we're going to have some pains. I don't think you can compare any region with another because they all have different characteristics, but I'll tell you one thing, they've all gone through the same kind of problems."

TWO CHALLENGES
A Burlington councillor before he first assumed Halton's chairmanship two years ago, Mr. Raftis said he is untroubled by Burlington's professional and in some cases, he admits—personal opposition to his holding office for another term.

During unofficial chairmanship elections held three weeks ago, Mr. Raftis was challenged by Oakville Coun. Terry Mannell and Burlington representative Walter Mulkewich.

Because of his support for Halton's sewer rates scheme, by which the region's southern communities help pay for sewer works programs in the north, Mr. Raftis failed to muster support in those elections from a number of southern councillors—particularly Burlington's nine-man contingent, who backed Coun. Mulkewich for the chairmanship instead.

Formally re-elected to another two-year term as Halton's regional chairman Dec. 11, Jack Raftis sat down with The Herald last month for an in-depth interview examining his views on regional parochialism, managerial and financial shortcomings, the role of north Halton and the future of regional government in Halton. Problems encountered by council the past term, he said, simply act as "cement" to more closely bind the four member municipalities.

During last week's Halton Hills council inauguration, Mr. Raftis praised Mayor Pete Pomeroy and his regional team for their support, without which, he said, he probably would not have been returned to office.

"I have to represent the whole region," Mr. Raftis said earlier. "I don't have the luxury of being parochial, so naturally I divide the region."

While he said he favors letting area municipalities collect sewer revenues however they wish, he insists that financing sewer programs must be done on a regional basis, which is now helping to pay off a \$5.5 million sewage treatment plant expansion completed in Georgetown two years ago.

Reflecting on the deficit which forced the resignations of chief administrative officer Ernie Reid and treasurer Don Farmer, Mr. Raftis said that had auditors been able to discover the shortfall earlier, it might have been corrected before the 1980 operating budget was endorsed by council.

"We didn't know that the auditor's final report had not been submitted prior to the budget being set," Mr. Raftis explained.

All but \$37,000 of the original deficit has been recovered this year through drawing from savings made in other departments, program cutbacks and employing \$440,000 in reserve funds.

But the deficit issue underlined communication problems between Halton's administrators, council and the auditors, raising questions about how efficiently the region was being run under the current managerial structure.

In September, regional council opted for a comprehensive study of how Halton was being administered and Hickling-Johnston Management Consultants of Toronto was hired to conduct a \$75,000 review, which includes helping

the region replace its CAO and treasurer.

"The management study (with preliminary findings expected by mid-1981) will deal with unresolved issues concerning management at the region, including the effectiveness of the treasury department," Mr. Raftis said.

Chairing the committee comprising the mayors of Halton's four area municipalities, Mr. Raftis added that the study will also touch on the effects of parochial voting at regional council.

REGIONAL PLAN
But Mr. Raftis is pleased with the achievements Halton has enjoyed under his leadership, especially the signing of the region's official plan in August. Although approved by all levels of government, the official plan still faces a court challenge expected this spring from Halton's aggregate industry, which is angered that the plan was signed before it had a chance to appeal it.

"It's almost impossible to have 100 per cent approval of a document which permeates four area municipalities without having some disputes which will have to be resolved," Mr. Raftis said.

Halton's three-year old business development department has also impressed Mr. Raftis with its attempts to bring industry into the region. Involved in a highly competitive market with Ontario's various regions, the department has been successful in determining the type of

industries best suited to the different characteristics of the region's municipalities.

"Warehousing needs are better suited for the north, where the industries are less likely to draw heavily on the sewer system," Mr. Raftis said. "Heavier industries can be located in the south where the hard-servicing (sewer and water) is available."

"The department has to function for the region, by selling Halton Hills, Burlington, Oakville and Milton as four distinct municipalities—with different lifestyles—as good places to live," he added.

ONLY FORCE
As the region continues to grow, gradually taking over services such as sewer and watermain maintenance once handled by the towns, Mr. Raftis is confident that there is no intention on the part of the province to have regional government supplant local councils as the only municipal force with which it has to deal.

"I'd never stand for a further breakdown of local municipal power," Mr. Raftis said. "The two-tier system of government and I'll always support four distinct areas with different characteristics."

While the region is moving to eliminate areas where it matches services provided by local administrations, there are also suggestions, primarily the idea of sharing methods used to collect sewer and water rates, which could eventually see the region returning some powers to the area municipalities.

Nevertheless, Mr. Raftis points out, because the province has slowly opted out of many local funding responsibilities (and cut back on others) which once enabled the local governments to retain autonomy under the old county system, towns now have to draw on the region's wider tax base to pay for municipal works projects.

Hardly an unopinionated chairman, Mr. Raftis' unconventional, albeit color-

ful, chairmanship in the last two years has drawn chuckles from gallery, left delegations before council rosy-checked and irked not a few members of council. Although reluctant to compare himself with Halton's two former chairmen, Allan Masson and Halton Hills' Ric Morrow, Mr. Raftis said he has a particularly high regard for the latter.

NOTELECTED
"You've got to remember that Masson was appointed by the provincial government and not by council," Mr. Raftis explained. "It was almost impossible for him to perform."

"I think Ric would agree. Our outlooks are the same and I think that, more than anyone else in politics at the time, I shared with him the same style. He did an exceptional job."

But even as chairman Raftis is about to launch his second term in office, doubts linger about the political weather ahead. With seven new councillors seating themselves in regional chambers for the first time today, speculation continues about whether or not newly-elected Oakville councillors Anne Mulvale, Gord Reade, Fred Olliver and Keith Bird, as well as Milton's Mayor Gord Krantz and Coun. Brad Clements, will help maintain Halton's sewer surcharge revenue collection system, the issue which spawned so much division



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