

Halton Hills Outlook

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877-2201 877-2202 877-8822

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Their Outlook

Tories believe Peterson is simply an opportunist

Although it is hard to believe when you look at the polls, not everyone in Ontario thinks Premier David Peterson is the greatest thing since sliced bread. And probably the most intense critic is Tom Long, the Ontario Progressive Conservative Party president. He's a partisan, of course, with a visceral dislike of Liberals and New Democrats (or Grits and Socialists as he would likely say). In that sense, he reminds me somewhat of Liberal Sean Conway, another who is young, (although not as young as Long) and in whose veins partisan blood runs thickly.

Some blame the media for being pro-Grit. Others think Peterson is just lucky. Beyond that, though, they don't believe Peterson stands for anything. They see him simply as an opportunist.

"David Peterson, void of conviction and vision, views all of politics as one endless stream of unconnected and unrelated skill-testing questions," Long said in one speech. "There are no goals, no foundations, just a bewildering swamp of details and conflicting pressures."

"He and his party have purchased their program like some product off a shelf from a competing political party purely and simply to achieve power."

"The Peterson Liberals may temporarily hold power, but they will leave no indelible mark upon the pages of the history of this province."

His trip to Washington was simply "cheap headline grabbing" and his performance at federal/provincial conference "disruptive and negative," Long said.

For most people, it is a view of Peterson and his government that is quite jarring when first heard, since it conflicts so strongly with the general public perception.

People seem to rather like Peterson and his style. They feel comfortable with him. He's a younger, more alive Bill Davis. They trust him to run a competent government. And whether it is true or not, it is a perception that those who are repelled by Peterson politics have to acknowledge.

Long insists (at least publicly) that the Conservatives can win the next election, that once the electorate starts paying attention, the "real David Peterson" will come out and be rejected by Ontarians.

Being ahead or behind in the polls really means nothing nowadays (ask John Turner and Frank Miller about how they stood going into their election campaigns) and a volatile electorate can shift parties quickly.

Most observers think Long is dreaming. Some think he's actually running for leader in the following election.

Maybe. But his negative view of Peterson is real. And in the Grit euphoria caused by 50 per cent polls it should be remembered there are dissenters out there.



Queen's Park

By Derek Nelson

But it is more than that. Like his party leader, Larry Grossman, Long appears to genuinely view Peterson as a man who's good with television fluff ("the atmospherics of government" is how Grossman describes it) but lacks substance.

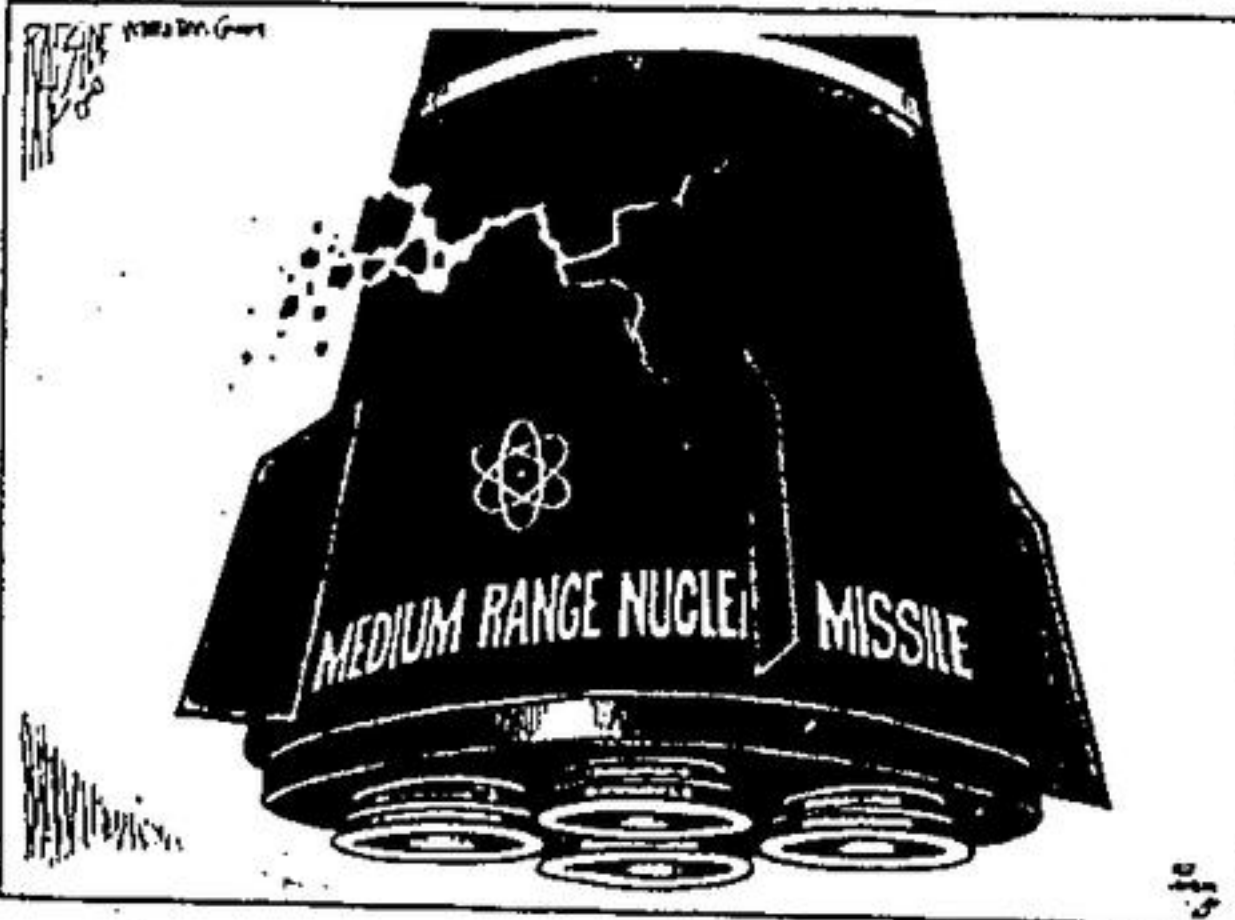
"Down deep, Peterson's shallow," is how the cliché runs.

There's a touch here of Tory disbelief that the man they never took seriously as an opposition leader is now the premier with a better than 50 per cent rating in the polls.

They can't credit Peterson with that much skill (and that is one of the reasons they are now in opposition).

Their view of Peterson is best exemplified by a tasteless joke about "retards" Peterson made at a testimonial dinner this winter. That's the "real David Peterson," they'll say. Can you ever imagine Bill Davis or Larry Grossman being that insensitive?

And they can't understand why he gets away with such faux pas without any criticism sticking (the Teflon Premier is the media's half-admiring, half-sarcastic label for it).



Story raises fascinating human-interest questions

There is absolutely no difficulty in finding people, particularly among Conservatives, who feel the media have been overplaying, if not overkilling, those elaborate renovations on the residences of Prime Minister Brian Mulroney.

We're talking specifically about the \$308,000 paid out by the PC Canada Fund - the money-raising arm of the Conservative Party - to bring 24 Sussex Dr. and the prime minister's Harrington Lake cottage uptoscratch.

Those who criticize the media for their generosity of words on the subject make a point of saying the money came from the party. And since both the prime minister's official residence on Sussex Drive, and his cottage, are for the use of all subsequent prime ministers, it's being argued that the Tories are doing us a favor.

"The winners out of this are the taxpayers," said Tory MP Allan Lawrence. And Transport Minister John Crosbie has said the taxpayers should be grateful.

Perhaps. But, even if we acknowledge this, along with the fact the story might have received more attention than it technically deserved, the whole business does raise some intriguing questions. It also raises some fascinating human-interest questions.

OBVIOUS INTEREST
Just as the American public seemed unduly fascinated when Nancy Reagan, at horrendous expense, had the china changed in the White House, the Canadian public has always had more than a passing interest in the lifestyle of the Mulroneys - the closest we have to a Canadian first family.

When Mila Mulroney established her own office, in the same public building as the prime ministers', it became a first for Canada. There were stories galore about the costs involved. And there has certainly been an unabated interest in her elaborate wardrobe - the prime minister's too, for that matter - and all the presidential-style trappings

surrounding them. So when it was reported, first in the Toronto Globe and Mail, that the PC Canada Fund was pitching in an additional \$308,000 for home improvements, it was, as they say, news. Apart from everyone else, Canadian taxpayers spent more than \$3 million in the last couple of years fixing up these two - and three other - official residences, in and around Ottawa. The fact that the PC Canada Fund had to augment this for the Mulroneys would seem to me to qualify for greater press coverage than, say, your average bake sale.

And, let's face it, we all love to read about a prime minister who requires closet space for 30 suits and 84 pairs of shoes - 50 of them expensive imports. Equally fascinating was the report that Mila Mulroney required 30 feet of hanging space for blouses and suits and 12 feet for evening dresses, along with room for 100 pairs of shoes.

For most of us who do it the other way around, it was probably difficult to come to terms with a living room carpet being changed four times to match new paint and fabric.

There is no point describing other renovations, even if some do seem rather difficult to comprehend. And certainly, no one would want the prime minister and his family to live in second-rate digs. Considering what they go through in an average work week, no one would begrudge them decent quarters where they could put up their feet once in awhile.

But that doesn't mean it's none of the public's business, or that the media should turn a blind eye.

Among the arguments on behalf of the resulting media attention: The Mulroneys themselves have, perhaps more than any predecessors, chosen to be a very public family. And everyone has an abiding interest in the goings-on of public families. The costs of these renovations, not to mention the wardrobes involved, would strike most Canadians as extravagant, if not staggering. That makes news.

Then, of course, there is the fact that donations to political parties, such as money contributed to the PC Canada Fund, earn tax credits for the donors. This means that we all have some indirect financial stake in party funds.



Ottawa Report

By Stewart MacLeod

Letters

Is not Canada a democracy?

Edit note: This letter was sent to the Herald for publication.
Right Honourable Brian Mulroney
Prime Minister of Canada
Parliament Hill, Ottawa

Dear Mr. Mulroney,
As a student and a concerned citizen, I feel it is my responsibility to let you, the elected leader of this country, know how the common person feels about the issues debated in Parliament. I am aware there are many issues, so I wish to express my views on only one, the Reinstatement of Capital Punishment.

Ever since 1976, when Parliament voted to do away with Capital Punishment by only six votes, people began to react. The costs of confining a criminal has grown tremendously; specialized doctors, personal guards, social workers, special facilities, regular prison staff, and many more costs are paid from the taxpayers money. Your government spends over forty thousand (\$40,000) dollars to confine ONE prisoner for a year. If you took a person convicted of first degree murder that was sentenced to life (twenty-five (25) years), the costs would range into the millions of dollars. Even after the twenty-five (25) years jail sentence, what is stopping a person who has just wasted his life in prison, from killing again?

Your government has asked us, how do we feel about Capital Punishment, and we have told you in the last election. Seventy-three (73) per cent of the people you represent have told you, Capital Punishment I feel it should be reinstated, but with restrictions. Obviously Capital Punishment is not for all criminals, not even for all murderers, but for those who endanger our country through treason, the persistent murderers, the premeditated murderers, the especially "Cop killers".

When the people elected your government in 1984, they elected a government that would listen to them. Since 1984, the polls on the Reinstatement of Capital Punishment have been in favour, and also in the House of Commons, where the people are represented, we find the same feeling, yet Capital Punishment has not been reinstated.

I understand any decision to reinstate Capital Punishment is being opposed by the Senate. These people were appointed by you and other prime ministers and we the people had no say in their appointment. How can these people have control over the people's decision. 104 highly paid senators blocking the decision of millions, where has the representative government gone? Today its Capital Punishment we are denied, what will it be in the future? I feel you, as an elected official, have a responsibility to the people. Do you not realize what a democracy is? Is not Canada a democracy? We elected you and the Conservatives not to make your own arbitrary decisions but to carry out the wishes of society. As what happened to Mr. Dr. Philbrook may happen to the Conservatives.

Yours truly,
Graham Edwards

