

Halton Hills Outlook

Their Outlook

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Reason to feel edgy over taxation reform

Finance Minister Michael Wilson has every reason to feel edgy these days as he puts the final touches on the tax reform white paper he will present to Parliament on June 18. Most Tories feel edgy about the reforms, one of many cornerstones in their highly-successful 1984 election campaign. And we're told that none is more edgy than Prime Minister Brian Mulroney.

Apart from everything else, the Liberals and New Democrats see the reform proposals as the most promising political issue of this Parliament. It's neither as divisive as, say, cruise-missile testing nor as confusing and complex as free trade or constitutional accords.

There have been, as we well know, some very stiff tax increases since the Conservatives came to power dedicated to reducing the huge budgetary deficit. Recently published figures suggest that personal income tax revenues this year will bring \$43 billion into the federal treasury. In 1984, the figure was \$29 billion. In the same period, revenue from federal sales and excise taxes rose to \$23 billion from \$14 billion.

Even with those huge gains, we've managed to lower the annual deficit by only \$5 billion or so. While the reforms may redistribute the burden, there obviously is little chance that our total tax bill will revert to 1984 levels. It would undermine that other cornerstone — a drastic reduction in the deficit.

And what we've been talking about so far is the good news part of the package. There have been fairly strong hints of a greatly expanded sales tax that could apply to food. Both Mr. Wilson and Mr. Mulroney, when questioned on this particular issue, have said that in the event of such a new tax, low-income earners could qualify for tax credits.

These comments shouldn't be made without good reason. It would be so much easier to react with horror at the mere mention of a tax on food.

Such a sales tax, which would incorporate provincial sales taxes, was advanced by Mr. Wilson as one of three options when he recently announced the date for presenting his white paper.

pay less income tax. "Lower (personal income tax) rates will benefit the large majority of taxpayers, not just now but well into the future as their incomes grow and they get to keep more of each tax dollar."

The question here is, lower than what? Mr. Wilson lately has been dodging some fairly pointed questions about this, including one from NDP Leader Ed Broadbent: "Will the minister at least guarantee that taxes will not be any higher after reform than when he was elected?"

No answer. The only assurance is that a majority of taxpayers will pay less in personal income tax once the reforms are implemented.

LONG BATTLE
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Is baseball still America's pastime?

The TV just happened to be on the other Sunday afternoon. Off-hand, I can't recall just why it was that I was sitting in front of the TV on a perfectly nice Sunday afternoon — quite possibly I was trying to avoid cutting the grass.

In any case, the TV was on. And what should be on the TV but a thoroughly remarkable debate.

A couple of American sports announcers were trying to resolve that burning issue of our times: Is baseball still America's national pastime?

Quite frankly, as a Canadian, I had never really considered that the Americans might still view baseball as their national pastime. I had assumed that the national pastime in Reagan's America was Being Back and Standing Tall.

Or perhaps Putting Out Fires in the Back Yard (which is much more strenuous than cutting the grass).

Still, this little debate raised a provocative question in the Canadian mind. To wit: do we, as Canadians, have such a thing as a national pastime?

Presumably, such noted sociologists as Don Cherry would argue that hockey is our national pastime. But this claim seems a bit shaky.

To begin with, it's questionable whether hockey — at least as it's played at the professional level — can truly be called a "pastime". If the average Stanley Cup playoff game is a "pastime", then so was the landing at Normandy.

Resides, a pastime should be a year-round activity, whereas there is no hockey at all for one or two weeks in August (i.e. hockey is not played during Winnipeg's spring, summer and fall).

All of which leaves us with the question unanswered: what is Canada's true national pastime? Until fairly recently, it could have been argued that the national pastime was resenting Pierre Trudeau. This was a year-round activity and it could be enjoyed by almost anyone, since the only re-

quirement was a secret belief that Pierre thought you were an idiot. But this pastime is no longer available to us, and nothing has really stepped forward to replace it.

Oh, there has been some attempt to make a national pastime out of disliking the CBC but this just isn't the same. For starters, it just isn't very satisfying to dislike a corporate entity. For resentment to gain the status of a genuine pastime, it has to be focussed on a specific personality — and you'd look pretty silly if you tried to form a local chapter of Right-Thinking Canadians Against Knowlton Nash.

As such, most Canadians just settle for ignoring the CBC — which is at best an avocation, rather than a pastime.

A cynic might take a different tack, and suggest that Canada's national pastime is something like collecting unemployment insurance. But here again, we run into problems with the definition of "pastime".

Thanks to the efforts of various governments at various levels, there are now a number of areas in Canada in which collecting UI has actually become a career.

Actually, in looking back over this partial list, an interesting pattern begins to emerge — every one of these has been a passive pastime. As such, we might postulate that the national pastime (if such exists) has something to do with being a spectator. Perhaps even a spectator to events south of the border.

At the moment, for instance, a fairly popular pastime is reading about the allegations of a romantic liaison with a gorgeous model that wrecked Gary Hart's presidential aspirations, and trying to imagine this happening to Ed Broadbent.

Or, perhaps, reading about the sex scandal that ruined Jim Baker's ministry, and trying to imagine this happening to the Moderator of the United Church.

Personally, I'd prefer to believe that Canada's national pastime must be something much deeper and more profound. For instance, for a small minority of Canadians, a popular pastime is writing books that try to establish the nature of our national identity.

On the other hand, a popular pastime for a vastly larger number of Canadians is not reading these books.

Similarly, it's tough to make a case that we make any sort of national pastime of mythologizing the events that shaped our country.

Potential backyard hazards

From fuels to pools, the paraphernalia of consumer demand careful handling, especially when children are around.

"Backyards are full of potential hazards at this time of year," says Bob Clendinning, Director of Fuels Safety for the Ontario Ministry of Consumer and Commercial Relations (MCCR) which is gearing up for a major summer safety campaign. "The key word here is 'potential'. Many of the incidents reported to our branch and safety organizations throughout the province could be avoided. We urge parents to use the resources available to them to learn how best to keep their children safe this summer."

As a start, Mr. Clendinning suggests families become familiar with safety rules for handling such common fuels as propane and gasoline. Brochures on these topics are available from the ministry's Consumer Information Centre, 555 Yonge St., Toronto, Ontario, M7A 2T6, (416) 963-1111. (toll free) 1-800-268-1142. Ontario residents with an 897 area code may call the 416 line collect.

As well as promoting careful use of fuels — an area directly legislated by the ministry — officials urge parents to brush up on good water safety practices.

A number of organizations can provide information on general water safety and rescue techniques, along with advice on avoiding diving injuries, a widespread concern.

Sources include: —The Royal Life Saving Society of Canada (Ontario branch), (416) 447-7278, 43 Coldwater Rd., North York, Ontario, M3B 1Y8. The Society recently produced a "basic water rescue program" called Rescue Smart. A nine-lesson handbook, the program is designed to be taught by parents or other adults and covers such topics as causes of drowning, diving injuries and rescue techniques. The new guidebook costs \$10. The Society also has a number of brochures available free. Films and videos can be borrowed at no cost.

Information, brochures and posters may be obtained at most municipal and YMCA swimming pools. —The Canadian Red Cross Society (Ontario), (416) 923-6692, 460 Jarvis St., Toronto, Ontario M4Y 2H5 — also operates water safety and swimming courses through municipal pools and other community facilities throughout Ontario. For information not available locally, contact the Ontario divisional headquarters listed above.

—The St. John Ambulance Society, (416) 923-8411, 46 Wellesley St. E., Toronto, Ontario M4Y 1G5. Another excellent source of safety information, the Society operates branch offices across the province. Numbers are available from the provincial headquarters in Toronto. Although they are not specifically summer-related programs, childcare and babysitting courses run by St. John Ambulance may also be of interest to parents.

Some other year round safety concerns and suggested sources of information follow: —Cribs, children's portable car seats, cradles, pacifiers, clothing flammability, playpens, strollers and toys — contact Consumer and Corporate Affairs Canada's Product Safety Branch — 200 Town Centre Court, Scarborough, Ontario M1P 4X8, (416) 973-4705 or 10 John St. S., Hamilton, Ontario, L8N 4A7, (416) 572-2845.

A local librarian may be able to help find sources of information on other child safety concerns.



Ottawa Report

By Stewart MacLeod

Tax reform not only affects all of us directly, but it's a subject that gets us down to basic dollars and cents. Like the universality of family allowances, or the de-indexing of old-age pensions, or even changes to drug patents, we understand what's at stake.

And since we know the government needs more money, there will be searing examinations of every new proposal.

The question which seems to be giving Mr. Wilson and Mr. Mulroney the most difficulty right now is whether we'll be paying less taxes after reform than we did when the Tories were elected.

The silence on these questions, which have come from both the Liberals and New Democrats, has been almost deafening. But we can probably guess at the answer.

FAIRNESS EMPHASIZED
So far, government spokesmen have been emphasizing the greater degree of fairness in the system. Mr. Wilson has said that comprehensive tax reform is "one of the most promising opportunities we have to strengthen our economy and improve the quality of our society." He has also said, of course, that under his proposed reform most of us will



"They tell me you've quit smoking!"