

Halton Hills Outlook

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Their Outlook

Terrible timing



Ottawa
Stewart MacLeod
Thomson News Service

As if Liberal Leader John Turner didn't already have enough problems, he had to go out and create a new one. It might not prove to be monumental, mind you, but at this stage, he doesn't need even the slightest unnecessary glitch.

And this one was entirely unnecessary. Coming from such an experienced politician, it was, in fact, inexcusable.

What we're talking about is timing - one of the most crucial factors in the success, or otherwise, of political lives. What passes as brilliant politics on one particular day can be an absolute bomb the following day.

There was no problem a few days ago when the Liberal leader accused the Mulroney government of running up an enormous \$12-billion tab as it tossed out pre-election goodies from one end of Canada to the other. No opposition leader could be expected to do less on the eve of an election.

In the last election campaign, you might recall, Brian Mulroney never missed an opportunity to tell Canadians that the Turner-led Liberals were spending them out of house and home in an irresponsible drive for re-election. So the prime minister obviously knew that the favor would be returned in this campaign.

But even he could not have predicted how Mr. Turner's timing would make things so easy for him.

Within 24 hours of accusing the Tories of trying to buy their way back into office, Mr. Turner was at it himself. It isn't difficult to imagine what the prime minister will do with this.

BIG BUCKS

While Canadians were still toting up Mr. Turner's estimate of alleged Tory vote-buying, the Liberal leader goes to Whistler, B.C., and unveils the first major plank in his election platform - promising to spend \$5 billion to help municipalities rebuild sewer systems, roads and water mains.

It matters not about the virtues of the proposal. But what does matter is the timing. If Mr. Turner wants to get Canadians worked up over the government's alleged \$12-billion spending spree, surely it would be prudent to wait more than 24 hours

before announcing a single Liberal program that will cost \$5 billion.

To make it even easier for Mr. Mulroney to counter-attack, the Liberal proposal would also involve equal municipal and provincial participation over five years. This means that any astute politician - and the prime minister qualifies in this respect - is able to talk, albeit it loosely, about the Liberal plan for spending \$15 billion.

And this is simply one plank in a platform that has yet to be unveiled.

It would be different if Mr. Turner was pressed for time. But the election hadn't even been called. And after it's called, there is going to be nearly two months for the distribution of goodies.

Admittedly, the Liberal leader had the perfect audience - the British Columbia Union of Municipalities - as the original idea for such a three-government program came from the Federation of Canadian Municipalities.

Still, Mr. Turner didn't have to make his announcement at that moment. He had been doing quite nicely attacking the government for "dishing out millions of dollars as a pre-election slush fund for the Conservative Party."

SHOULD WAIT

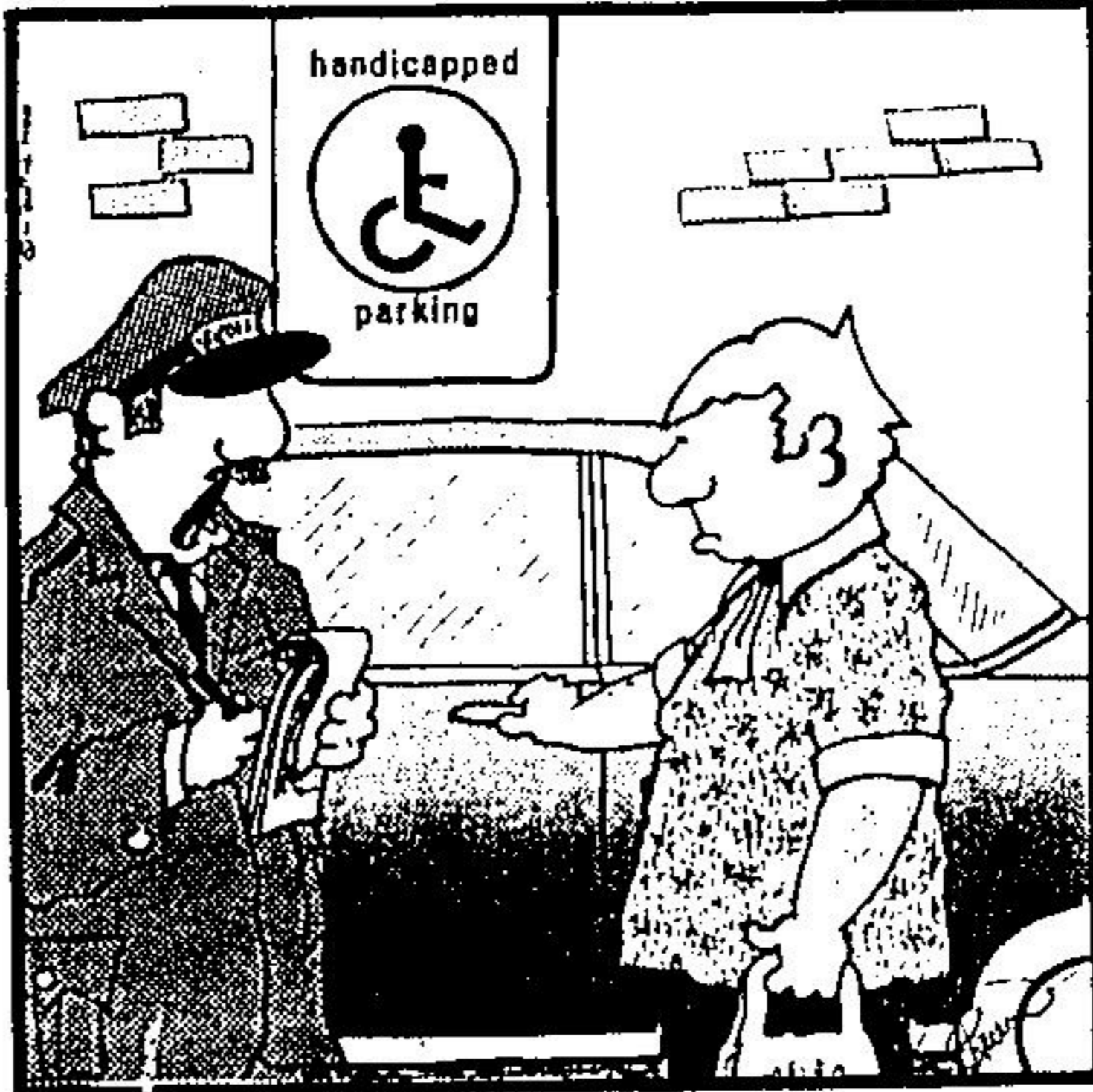
The Liberal leader should have given the public a few weeks, at least, to concentrate on the summer-long Tory spending spree before cluttering up the books with his own pledges.

Lord knows there is enough to think about. We have \$515 million for regional development in Quebec; \$3.2 billion for the Hibernia oil field; \$750 million for 12 minesweepers; \$420 million for army vehicles; \$6.4 billion for child care over seven years; \$110 million to fight illiteracy; \$64 million to help the wine and grape industry adjust to free trade; \$150 million for a gas pipeline to Vancouver Island. And it was still coming, including up to \$1 billion for an oil-sands project in Alberta.

It can be argued, of course, that Mr. Turner should be very careful in any specific attacks on this spending, since most of the projects are very popular in the affected regions. Instead, some Liberals say, he should talk in general terms about what Ottawa can and cannot afford. And he could certainly emphasize the timing, the fact that most of the money is being thrown out on the eve of an election.

Two's a Crowd

By BILL BUTTLE



I don't believe an ingrown toenail qualifies.

The ties that bind



Your Business
Diane Maley
Thomson News Service

Canadians may be the most forthright, unpretentious people in the world. If we don't understand something, we say so.

Seventy-seven per cent of us say we don't understand free trade enough to have an opinion about it. That wouldn't stop the Americans - which makes me wonder why we're afraid of being subsumed by them.

When pollsters ask the American public what they think of something, they line up for or against it whether or not they know the issues.

Indeed, one pollster not long ago tested the reliability of his polls by asking Americans what they thought of an issue that he had invented. The vast majority of those polled were either for or against the fake issue; few admitted that they had never heard of the problem before.

Opposition to free trade, particularly in Ontario, is "weird and worrying," in the words of one columnist, a "mystery that cannot be solved by rational analysis," according to a recent report by two economics professors from the University of Toronto.

The main objections to the free trade agreement are that we are too dependent on our trade with the Americans; the second is that they threaten to overwhelm us culturally. The issue of trade dependency calls to mind the Third Option of former prime minister Pierre Trudeau, who sought to expand our trade ties with Europe and the Far East.

THIRD OPTION

It is sad, but the initiative fell flat. Europe, as well as being highly protectionist, is abandoning its smokestack industries - the logical buyers of Canadian raw materials. Japan, Korea and Taiwan are so busy trying to offset their big trade surplus with the Americans that they have to buy all the U.S. goods

they can manage, to balance the sales. Canadian exports get ignored in the process.

As it stands, nearly 80 per cent of our exports go to the United States; a similar proportion of our imports come from south of the border. The geography is compelling. To a great extent, as analysts have pointed out, the free trade deal that the Americans have signed would formalize the ties that already bind our two economies.

The result of this integration over the years has been a standard of living in Canada like that in the United States; a chicken or two in every pot and a Ford or two in every driveway - and televisions and VCRs in the living room.

ALL-AMERICAN

More puzzling than the trade issue is our fear of being subsumed by American culture. As children, we knew all about Tom Sawyer. If a story, a rhyme or a legend wasn't American, it was British. There was the London bridge and the Brooklyn bridge. A busy house was like Grand Central Station (who ever heard of Union Station?).

When we grew up, we'd move to New York, get a job on Madison Avenue, visit the Empire State building, go to Coney Island, see a Broadway show and stay at the Waldorf-Astoria.

All over Canada at Christmastime, we listened to Bing Crosby singing White Christmas or Silver Bells, songs as American as apple pie. Today, three generations of Canadians can be found all listening to the same music - that old American favorite, rock 'n' roll.

From Frank Sinatra to Elvis Presley to Bruce Springsteen, we have been raised on American culture and hold it to be our own. Whatever still distinguishes us from Americans will remain, for better or worse, after the free trade is signed.

It's time we stopped shrinking from shadows on the wall and mustered the courage to take a chance on a deal that will allow us to preserve a standard of living that is North American through and through. Otherwise, we may find we differ from the Americans in the wrong ways.

What's the true story?



Staff Comment

By BRIAN MACLEOD

Will we ever know the true story behind the Ben Johnson saga?

I doubt it. After being stripped of his gold medal, Johnson's coaches and doctor started throwing around the old "the water bottles must have been switched" excuse.

Although it is not entirely inconceivable, virtually every person who has tested positive for steroids has used a similar excuse.

What is it that makes Ben Johnson so different?

Is it not entirely inconceivable that once he found himself floundering in the two previous 100-metre sprints during the summer, Johnson attempted to find a quick cure in a desperate bid to prepare in time for the Olympics?

I don't think Johnson should be crucified for taking steroids - whether he knew about it or not.

In the highest echelons of athletic competition, steroids are merely a fact of life.

I just find it interesting that millions of Canadians who don't even know the man, can say "he's different. He wouldn't take steroids. Somebody must have given it to him."

Even now, after the events of the past week, I consider myself lucky to be one of the people who has seen Ben Johnson run and train.

While I attended York University in the early 1980s, I often worked out at the Metro Track and Field Centre on campus - the stomping ground of Johnson, Mark McCoy, Angela Taylor, and Desai Williams. Back then Taylor (now Issajenko) was the star of the bunch.

Johnson, McCoy and Williams were yet to compete in the 1984 Olympics. They were just known to us regulars at the centre as a gang who could tear up the 100-metre oval indoor track.

They were amazing. Many times we stopped what we were doing and watched in awe as these runners, whose names meant little to us, tore around the track making virtually no noise. It seemed to the onlooker that their feet never touched the ground. You had to see it to believe it.

Steroids were available at the track and field centre. I knew two people - weightlifters - who were using them when I was there. But that gang of runners was never associated with the drugs.

What has bothered me is the assault on the media by some people in the whole affair. The media have hung Johnson without a trial, they say.

While I agree some papers have gone too far, a newspaper's job, it has been said, is to chronicle history as it happens.

And Ben Johnson was caught with steroids in his body. That's a fact.

His excuse is no different than others who've been caught. We just like him too much to believe it.

Ben Johnson will reveal his story in a West German magazine on Monday.

If Ben Johnson says it ain't so, remember this, so have many others.

What did you think then?

Berry's World



LETTER

Consider the issues

Dear Sir,

An editorial by Brian MacLeod in your (Outlook) publication of Sept. 24, 1988 did an excellent job of taking us through "last week's five-hour discussion" at town council re. abandoned CN railway line.

"Showed what motivated citizens with a clear purpose can do!"

However he immediately followed this - and I quote, "You have to wonder how important the issue of leadership will be in the upcoming federal election."

It seems to me we should each be considering the important issue of leadership as we prepare to cast a vote in the upcoming municipal election.

Thank you.

Lew Ward