

MP prepared to hear from the people

Last Wednesday night, the spirit of democracy burned hot as we had the first Town Hall meeting in this new federal riding of ours. About 60 people crowded a room in Bolton, and we talked about what's right and what needs fixing in this country.

I really enjoyed the session, and look forward to the one slated for this Wednesday (Jan. 25) at the North Halton Golf Club in Georgetown. The week after, the Halton-Peel road show moves on to M.M. Robinson School, in Burlington.

Before last week's event, Dorothy and I were out going door-to-door, and then meeting shoppers in the grocery store, letting them know about the meetings. One woman's reaction seemed typical of a lot of people. "Boy," she said, "are you ever brave!"

That worried me a bit, and I suddenly wondered what was going to happen at an evening when the doors were thrown open to anyone to come and ask or tell me anything.

But I survived. Actually, the two-hour session taught me a lot. We talked about the country's economy; about social spending; taxes; immigration; language rights in Quebec; and we even had a show of hands in the audience on who would build and who would scrap nuclear-powered submarines. (The subs won.)

This week's agenda in Georgetown will be pretty close, and I hope that everyone who comes to the second Town Hall meeting is as frank and sincere as the citizens were in Bolton. As I start to think about heading back to Ottawa in a few weeks, this kind of input is invaluable.

A couple of weeks ago in this space I was talking about what I see as one of our greatest problems, and that's the fact we spend 30 per cent more each year than we take in. That shortfall is called the deficit, and last year it was about \$28 billion. Each year that we run a deficit, it gets added to the national debt, which is now around \$300 billion.



On The Hill
With
Garth Turner

In that column I said we had two choices to make if the deficit's ever to drop: Cut spending, or raise taxes. And I asked readers if they had any comments for an MP to take to the federal finance minister.

Burlington Mayor Roly Bird was one of the first off the mark.

"Please be assured," he wrote me, "that I fully agree it is clearly time to get the national house in order, and begin to address not only the current annual deficit, but also the accumulated deficit. I am pleased that you will be one MP that will be speaking and working with the finance minister in regards to that."

"As to your question whether people can stomach higher taxes, it is my view that they will have to. Otherwise, the only other way to reduce the deficit is to cut programs and benefits, and this would cause an even greater uproar amongst Canadians."

Of course, not everyone agrees.

Our Bolton meeting, for example, was rocked at times by the comments of those who said taxation had already reached the breaking point.

And Chris Gudgeon, of Georgetown, took the time to send me a long letter. It was tinged with more than a little anger - as the father of four with a wife who chooses to stay at home and look after the children.

"Your peers have lost touch with reality," he told me. "Does some sort of change come over these people once they reach Ottawa? Is there some great book they are shown that forces them to change, or set aside their promises and follow a great, guiding light to the country's downfall? You, of all

people, should know the answer to whether we should pay more taxes.

"If you think this country is in bad shape now, try to imagine what it is going to be like when the middle class takes the economy underground. I am sick, sick and tired of paying taxes to this country and in return being asked to pay more."

A lot of people feel that way. And in my other life as a journalist I spent years blasting politicians for mindlessly raising taxes, while ignoring the real burden this was putting on working people.

Nothing's changed. I have not suddenly forgotten after being elected. Taxes hurt - and that can't

be the only solution to the problem we have of paying off Canada's mortgage.

But if taxes do have to increase, then they have to do it with protection for those who need it - people who have turned into our working poor, or our working enslaved.

Chris Gudgeon makes me a promise: "I intend to follow your career and make sure that you stick to your promises and principles, even after you have read the great book of stupid government," he writes.

That's okay with me.

In fact, it's only with that kind of help - the letters, the phone calls, the attendance at public meetings -

that our messages can be taken to the feds and dumped into the lap of government.

Surviving the next few years will take some skill and some stick-handling. I suspect there will be tough decisions - and some unpopular ones. It's up to the people to make sure they're also fair.

"Represent the real core of the country, the middle class," Gudgeon tells me, "proud Canadians who are not prone to voicing their thoughts or complain, who take care of themselves and work hard."

That, Chris, is exactly what brought me here.

Deer struck by vehicle

A Ford Bronco driven by an Erin man struck a "herd of deer" on Trafalgar Road near Highway 7 early Friday morning.

Halton Regional Police say Albert Lefabre, 34, of Erin, was driving the 1988 Bronco, northbound on Trafalgar Road, when a

herd of deer began to cross. One deer was struck by the vehicle's rear fender, another hit the passenger door. The truck was lightly damaged.

Police are not pressing charges and report no injuries in the accident.



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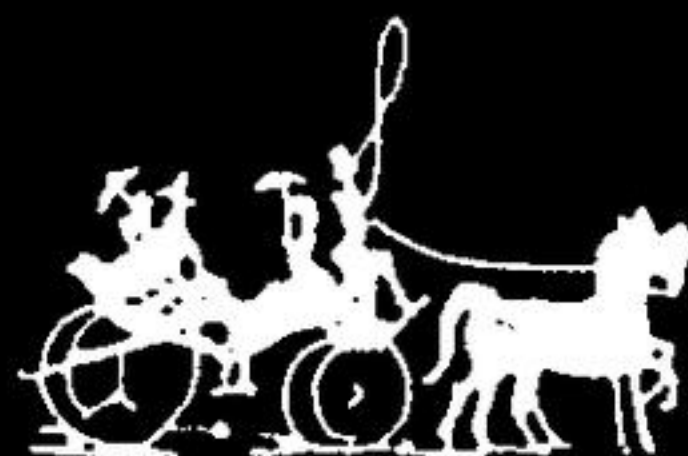
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