

# the HERALD Outlook

## A special package



### Ottawa

Stewart MacLeod  
Thomson News Service

One of Prime Minister Brian Mulroney's priorities in the next Parliament should be the re-introduction of his "ethics package," governing the behavior of MPs and senators.

The legislation was on the order paper when Parliament was dissolved for the Nov. 21 election, so it died at dissolution. But events of the past few months strongly suggest it is needed.

What we learned, through court documents, was that Senator Michel Cogger, a close friend of Mr. Mulroney, received \$110,000 last year from a Montreal high-tech company for representations he made to aides of the prime minister.

The company, GigaMos Corp., was looking for federal help in establishing a project in Quebec. Despite the efforts of Senator Cogger, the help was not forthcoming.

But his intervention does raise questions about the ethics of parliamentarians being paid by private firms to make representations on their behalf. It's one thing for outside consultants - i.e. lobbyists - to get paid for making a case for any company, but it's quite another when the paid lobbyist is an MP or senator.

And while Mr. Mulroney's ethics package may be far from perfect, it would go some distance toward eliminating conflicts of interest. There will never be unanimity on such legislation.

#### MORE DISCLOSURE

What it would do, among other things, is require MPs and senators to reveal corporate directorships, shareholdings, family financial arrangements and fees charged for private consulting. The disclosure would be made to an independent ethics commission that could, if the situation warranted, make the information public.

It would make parliamentarians think twice before taking on anything that smacks of a conflict.

For every MP and senator who is asked about the legislation, there is usually a different opinion.

#### SNAFU® by Bruce Beattie



"I guess I'll wait till he decides whether or not to jump..."

While Liberal MP Don Boudria has said it is "totally inappropriate" for any parliamentarian to act as a paid lobbyist, Senator Ian Sinclair sees nothing wrong with a senator carrying on his normal business, whether it be in medicine, teaching or law. Senator Cogger was acting as a lawyer for GigaMos Corp.

"The Senate is not a full-time occupation," said Senator Sinclair. "And, my God, it's getting a little silly if a person who's in the law business can't conduct his business."

He says that senators who perform outside services are not in conflict so long as they do not participate in committee work or votes relating to these services.

Under existing rules, senators are prohibited only from voting on any matter in which they have a "pecuniary interest not available to the general public."

#### NOT EASY

Admittedly, it can be a very grey area.

Even the government's relatively mild ethics package is seen by some parliamentarians to be going too far.

After it was introduced, Tory MP Vincent Della Noce remarked that "it's got to the point where we'll have to make a statement every time we go to the toilet so that we aren't taken for homosexuals."

Senator Cogger is adamant that he did nothing improper and that he has no trouble looking at himself in the mirror.

Still, the senator is not a lawyer like any other. Nor, if he were lobbying, would he be a lobbyist like any other. Apart from being co-chairman of the Tory election campaign, he has extremely close connections to the prime minister's office - and to most other offices on Parliament Hill.

Regardless of what anyone says about the right of senators to conduct their own business, there is a difference between, say, law and dentistry. Or welfare work and lobbying.

There is also something inherently wrong, it seems to me, with a \$67,000-a-year senator also being paid for making representations on behalf of private interests.

Senator Cogger now must be privately rejoicing that GigaMos Corp. didn't get the federal assistance he sought. From a purely political standpoint, that failure might have been his greatest success.

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## Berry's World



Jim Berry  
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"We're not going to ask, but if you want to send some you-know-what to you-know-who, it's OK with us."

## Canadians see red



**Your Business**  
Diane Maley  
Thomson News Service

When it comes to social security payments, nothing is sacred, economists and business leaders are saying more loudly than they have dared for some time. Soon, politicians, too, will join in the refrain.

Government spending must be cut to wipe out the burgeoning budget deficit, business leaders argue. Only then can we begin to chip away at the federal government's \$275 billion in accumulated debt.

The mere suggestion of tampering with pensions, unemployment insurance or family-allowance payments tends to make Canadians see red. A few years back, when Finance Minister Michael Wilson tried to rein in pension payments, he was brought to heel quickly by the Grey Power movement. Pensioners, understandably, did not want to lose their inflation protection.

What makes business people and politicians seriously believe they can fiddle with social entitlements now? Times have changed. A Gallup poll conducted last fall revealed that 78 per cent of Canadians favor raising family-allowance payments and giving them only to those who need them.

Sixty-seven per cent approve of doing the same with old-age pensions. Most Canadians, it seems, no longer believe that social payments should be universal, for the rich and poor alike. On the other hand, many say they need the monthly cheques.

#### NOT MANY 'RICH'

Excluding the rich from universal family-allowance payments would not save much money because there are not that many rich people in Canada. Ottawa will

spend roughly \$3 billion this year on family-allowance payments.

By comparison, it will pay \$16 billion or so to pensioners and spend \$10 billion on unemployment-insurance benefits. Savings in this area could make a difference in the annual deficit, currently running at about \$28 billion.

But there are real problems with trying to cut people's pensions. Even if the government could do it, one has to wonder whether it should. At what income level would people be excluded? What would happen when a person's savings began to diminish?

Changes in government spending and taxing historically have hit middle-income people hardest because they form the largest population group. To be worthwhile, any reduction in social payments would fall most heavily on these same people.

The unemployment-insurance program is a different kettle of fish; clearly, there is room for improvement in this area. Whether there is also room for saving is not so clear. Presumably, cuts in payments would have to be offset by more spending on job training.

#### TRIAL BALLOON

All in all, what business and government leaders argue must be done likely will not be done. It rarely has been in the past. Even so, one can't help but notice the newfound confidence with which critics are speaking out against universal social programs.

Yves Guerard, chairman of the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, a business lobby group, says if spending is not curtailed, the safety net could crumble under its own weight.

"We are not proposing or suggesting that we should sabotage the existing system," Mr. Guerard says. "On the contrary, if we are to preserve it, the best way may be to prune it to a size that we can support. Otherwise, it will tumble under its own weight."

I don't agree. As long as the economy keeps growing, however slowly, the nation's financial position should improve.

## Burning issue



**Staff Comment**

Brian MacLeod

The successful application by a private firm to build an energy from waste plant in Brampton, may have some interesting ramifications for projects here in Halton.

A Consolidated Hearings Board gave SNC Inc. permission to build an EFW plant capable of burning 450 tonnes of waste a day at the Brampton plant.

Originally, Petro-Sun had applied jointly with SNC for the plant but Petro-Sun went bankrupt before the hearings were complete.

The decision on the Brampton EFW plant is groundbreaking because it is the first private EFW plant to be approved under the tight restrictions of the Environmental Assessment Act. Here in Halton Hills, Reclamation Systems Inc. is attempting to be the first private firm to have a landfill site approved under that same EA process, so they'll likely run up against some of the same problems that SNC did.

The board forced SNC to study possible alternatives to energy from waste. While the board acknowledged that alternative sites may be difficult to study because SNC doesn't have the power of expropriation, they could study alternatives to energy from waste. SNC's environmental assessment documents were declared inadequate by the board because they didn't study alternatives to energy from waste. But the firm was able to make up for missing information by providing oral and written evidence at the hearings.

RSI has always been hesitant to study alternatives, but if they've been watching this hearing, and no doubt they have, they sure have a clear path to follow now.

The decision may also have some impact on Halton Region's quest for energy from waste. The board concluded that the potential risk to human health from the facility is very low. It also considered nuisance factors such as odors and reduction in visibility.

If SNC was able to convince the board that an EFW plant is safe in the middle of a densely populated area such as Brampton, Halton, which has a commitment to building an EFW plant by 1996, shouldn't have any problem convincing a similar hearing of its safety in the early 1990s, when technology will have improved further yet.

There have been fears expressed by members of the public in Halton that an energy from waste plant will reduce the intensity of Halton's recycling efforts. After all, if you can burn it cheaply and get a payback through selling energy, why bother recycling? Halton is attempting to avoid that reasoning by introducing mandatory recycling of all residential homes by January, 1990.

The hearings board agreed with SNC's assertion that burning waste wouldn't affect high recycling levels. In fact, by recycling glass, newspapers, tin and plastic pop bottles, the EFW plant in Brampton will be able to burn at a higher temperature, which allows for a cleaner and safer burn.

Until now, Halton has been waiting for the province to take the lead in energy from waste. But they're tired of waiting. The SNC decision might just mean Halton residents will be burning their garbage sooner than they thought.