

What happened to the national crisis on toxic diesel fuel?



On The Hill
With
Garth Turner

OTTAWA-I guess this place takes some getting used to, because I'm still trying to figure it all out. Three weeks ago, for example, the House of Commons was obsessed with toxic waste being put into diesel fuel and shipped into Canada.

It was a national environmental crisis.

But have you heard anybody talking about toxic gas lately? Has a single politician brought it up? Has any investigation found anything?

This place seems to bounce around without direction - some days I swear the agenda is set by newspaper headlines. The temptation to over-react to things is strong. So is the tendency to confuse current events with those things which really matter.

All this means a newcomer like me has to work hard not to get sidetracked by things, and to keep my eye on those longer-term goals which brought me to apply for this job. Topping the list are three: Working for the environment; working against Canada's debt; and making damn sure our tax money is spent responsibly.

Over the past few weeks, my eyes have been opened wide to the fact that none of this is going to be easy. Dorothy and I were in Bolton and Burlington the other day to take part in road-side cleanups that had been well publicized and which helped to mark national Environment Week. Both mornings we pulled up to the appointed meeting place, and met a small handful of people.

Disappointed? Sure we were - I'll admit it.

But the experience just makes me more determined, too. All of us have an activist role to play if Canada is to be protected and improved for the next generation. Between now and next June I have a year to convince a lot more people that bending over for a morning, picking up trash, is as good for the soul as it is for the dirt.

Back in Ottawa, the House of Commons committee I chair has been doing its bit to look after tax bucks. Last week we had some tough questions for the public works minister, Elmer Mackay. I

know we're on the same side of the House, but that doesn't mean I turn into a governmental rubber stamp.

Mackay's department cancelled a new office building in Ottawa for 5,000 civil servants, through last April's budget. The ironic thing is that having the thing built (by private developers) could well end up saving the feds a lot of money. I have to tell you, that after three hours of testimony, a number of us left the table wondering if the right action had been taken.

I also asked Mackay why the government will spend another \$1.4 million putting up statues on Parliament Hill - when middle-class people are being asked to stomach big tax increases. Well, he agreed that might be sending "the wrong signal" to Canadians and maybe the spending should be reviewed.

You bet it should be. And it will.

On another front, we're in the middle of a review right now of how consumers are treated by the people who issue credit cards. There are strong opinions on both sides of the issue - some people think rates of 20 per cent or 28 per cent are obscene while others say nobody is forced to use plastic to buy things.

As with most things, the best view is probably somewhere in-between. Anyway, the hearings I am holding now will ask questions like, do consumers have enough information given to them to know the true costs of credit card usage? Should the bankers and the oil companies and everybody else putting a card out have the same method of charging interest? Why don't credit card rates fall when the Bank of Canada rate falls? And are we on the road to a cashless society, when debit cards will take money electronically from our bank accounts?

It strikes me these kinds of questions are good for an independent, all-party committee to ask. And if the answers are poor, well, we can always recommend that some kind of action be taken.

Personally, I think we've probably got enough laws already. But if these hearings identify problems, maybe the bankers and the other card issuers will move on their own to solve them - without MPs jumping into the marketplace.

We'll see. Meanwhile Dorothy and I - green garbage bags in hand - are off to muck through ditches in Georgetown. After all, we've got to keep things in perspective.

Idler is provoking and challenging



Ideas And The Arts

John Sommer

Of all the boys that went to school in Georgetown in the 1960s, David Warren was one of the most remarkable. Very early, when he was only 12 or 13 years old, he had one abiding interest: newspapers.

He taught himself everything there was to be known about the production and writing of newspapers and his room was filled, practically up to the ceiling, with huge, neatly stacked piles of newspapers from all over the world.

His father, a designer, was stationed for a year each in India and Thailand and the family went with him. To David this glimpse of the great world beyond Georgetown was the last push he needed to make his longing for escape complete. For a while, back in town, he edited a broadsheet which he called "ISSUES," pressing all his more ambitious friends into writing articles and book reviews for it. But soon everything simply got too small for him here and he felt he had to get out. He was only 16 years old when he stopped going to school and left Georgetown.

The following years he spent globetrotting in Asia and Europe, working at various newspapers in different countries, taking courses when he wanted to fill a hole in his education, and reading extensively, sometimes several books a day.

When he came to Canada occasionally he used to appear suddenly in town, never staying much longer than the hours to the next bus that would take him away

again. He had been a spindly, hyperactive youth. Now he grew large and hardly moved at all. His nose was turned into the wind, so to

say, and he seemed to be constantly searching for something, a fact, a turn of phrase, a humorous detail. His white face adopted an asiatic smile and, when excited or amused his cheeks and forehead would quickly bloom with a pink blush. He was always dressed in layers of frayed garments, regardless of the weather, as if the air in Canada gave him a perpetual chill.

He developed an extraordinary graceful style of talking and writing and the desire that never left him was to start a magazine of superior quality. In his own words "a magazine that is serious, but not humorless, learned, but not pedantic, literary, but not closeted, political, but not blinkered. A magazine for old-fashioned general readers who read for thought and pleasure, and not to kill time."

Finally, in December 1984, David launched what he had talked about for so long. The magazine was called "The Idler" and the first number, dated January 1985, was printed exactly 200 years after the great Samuel Johnson, David's literary hero, died in London, England, on December 13, 1784.

Since then, "The Idler" has appeared 23 times, which is a kind of miracle, considering the cost of such a venture and the limited readership for a magazine of this kind.

At its best "The Idler" is superb, as in a wonderfully idio-syncratic interview with the writer and art historian Scott Symons in the May-June 1989 issue, for instance. At its worst (rarely) it features writers like David Frum that are supercilious and overly fond of people in high places.

Time spent with "The Idler" is never boring but always thought-provoking and challenging. David Warren is an editor of vision, and this town, where he lived some of his formative years, has reason to be proud of him.

Write to "The Idler," 255 Davenport Road, Toronto, Ontario, M5R 1J9 for a subscription.

Friends of Lillian Black have arranged a sale of oil paintings from the estate of Frank C. Black to be held at the Lions Hall in Georgetown on June 24 from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.



WE ARE DEDICATED TO SERVICE

We have asked our carriers to complete their deliveries as early as possible, each week.

If your Herald is not delivered to your home please phone our circulation department.

CIRCULATION DEPARTMENT HOURS:

For your convenience the Circulation Department is open from 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday to Friday.

WE'LL DELIVER TO YOUR HOME 877-2201

OPEN
Mon. - Sat. 9-6
Fridays 9-9

Sussman's for Her

MAIN STREET ARTHUR

SUMMER

ON SALE

SAVE 20%-50% OFF

The Perfect Mix!
CO-ORDINATES
Very feminine looks in soft florals, pastel plaids & prints! Sweaters, skirts, blouses & vests as stylishly distinctive as they are pretty!! From the Masters!! Jones New York, Simon Chang, Steilmann & Mr. Jax.

Now... 20% OFF

DESIGNER ACTIVE WEAR
Shorts, shirts, pants and skirts from Ralph Lauren, Sperry Topsider and Royal Robbins all 100% cotton.

Save... 20% OFF

All Spring COATS and JACKETS
From London Fog! Sterling Stall! Novelti! Pizazz! and more!!

Now... 1/2 PRICE

THE MILNE HOMECARE AND PRESCRIPTION CENTRE
83 Mill St., Georgetown, Ont. (at Kings) Pharmacy Limited, 873-1010

NEW AID FOR DIABETICS

It's Amazingly Simple.

Insert ExactTech Test Strip Into Meter.

Place Blood On Target Area Of Test Strip.

Push The Button.

Introducing A Breakthrough In Blood Glucose Monitoring

The ExactTech System

Compact for Travel

\$249⁰⁰

THE MILNE HOMECARE AND PRESCRIPTION CENTRE
83 Mill St., Georgetown, Ont. (at Kings) Pharmacy Limited, 873-1010