

Bringing Canada's regions together



On The Hill
With Garth Turner

The car rolled up in front of the old brick building, and the three of us piled out. A couple of young girls were dancing to the sound of pipers, with about two dozen people walking around eating small cakes with strawberries heaped on them.

This was Tatamagouche, Nova Scotia, and upstairs last Wednesday morning in that building - a train station now converted into a bed-and-breakfast - were a dozen men waiting to talk to us. So, while the Tatamagouche Strawberry Festival happened on the grass outside, we talked about the hopes and dreams and fears of the people who called this place on the Northumberland Strait home.

This job of being a Member of Parliament has brought me so many new experiences, and here was another. Early last week I was asked to fly to New Brunswick, then travel by car through rural Nova Scotia with two other MPs - Ross Reid from Newfoundland and Bill Casey, whose territory this was. Our assignment: To listen.

Atlantic Canada is vastly different from where we live, and lately a number of people there have been feeling that southern Ontario doesn't understand or, perhaps, care. Things like rumored cutbacks in VIA rail service, changes to the unemployment insurance system and the closure of the military base at Summerside, PEI, are seen by some Maritime commentators as constituting a plot against the area.

We know that's not the case; and we also know that living where we do has its own stresses that rural Nova Scotians can't appreciate. Things like miles of traffic on the 401; house prices that deny ownership to many families; the necessity for two incomes in the household; and the relentless pace of life that economic growth brings.

Sitting there in Tatamagouche, listening to the lobster fisherman tell me how he worries about falling prices this year gave me a new understanding of how different this country can be. Last Wednesday alone the three of us met with well over 150 people in places like this, and Debert, Truro and Amherst. We listened, and made a lot of notes and asked what more the government could be doing to help everyday life.

Sure, everybody has their own special problems and view of what the politicians should do - but I was struck, over and over again, at how much they appreciated us being there.

Casey and Reid and I are all new Members of Parliament, and it seemed to us that this thing we were doing - listening to people - was perfectly natural. It is what I've tried to do in our community since the day I was elected. MPs are representatives of the people in the House of Commons, not substitutes for them. And only by

listening can we go back to Ottawa and be honest.

Now I know a lot more about what lies in the hearts of people in those places. And they know more about what it means to live in Bolton or Burlington, Georgetown, Acton or Caledon. In a few days I expect to be in Summerside, PEI, doing more listening. That community fears the future because of the decision to cut government spending by closing the base there. There must be solutions - some ways the site can be turned to other uses, so Summerside remains vibrant.

If I can help people there, I will. I know you'd want me to try.

Are taxes too high? Of course they are - and I had no trouble saying that on the main drag of Georgetown the other day when a rolling tax protest came to town.

An outfit called Cut Taxes Inc. chose the pavement outside my office for a demo which attracted a handful of curious people the Saturday before last. The protestors are angry that our tax burden seems to keep going up, while the deficit stays high and the national debt grows.

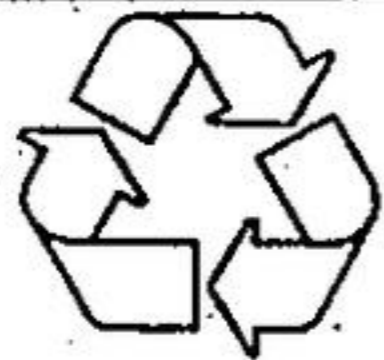
Personally, I can't help but support them - and I think any movement by people to raise awareness of the tax situation is a worthwhile one. One of the reasons I got into this job is because the country's economic situation worries me. Another is that I believe middle-class people carry the can for the rest of the taxpaying public, and the system has to be made fairer.

As a new politician, I can't turn things around in the first six months on the job - but I'm sure working on it. Mike Wilson knows that I think government spending is still too high, the deficit is bloated and taxes are at the breaking point.

Are there solutions? I think so. We need more cuts in Ottawa; we need to sell assets that the government has; we need to refinance the existing debt at cheaper rates; and we need to increase our trade. If all that happens, it strikes me there's no reason in the world that taxes have to rise.

I'm devoting all the time I can in the weeks before Parliament resumes to fine-tune such a plan; to prove it can work and to show the feds must look elsewhere than your pocket (and mine).

If you have any suggestions - for areas we can cut back on, or things the government might sell off to raise cash - then please pass them on to me. Write or call me anytime: the toll-free number is 1-800-668-4322, and the office address is 27 Main Street South, Georgetown L7G 3G2.



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Still spaces left in camp

Flash: The first two weeks have been a great success. The good news is that there are still a few openings left during the remaining four weeks!

Burl-Oak Camp provides boys, aged seven to 11, with a week-long outdoor camping experience at nearby Camp Manitou (conveniently located just north of Derry Road and west of Guelph Line in Milton District).

The camp is open to both

members and non-members of Scouts Canada. The Camp is designed to give all boys in the area a Scouting experience based on the Wolf Cub Program.

The Camp is operated by qualified Scouting staff who cater to the individual needs of each boy. Activities include: archery, swimming, campfires, crafts, hiking, nature lore, exciting field trips and much more!

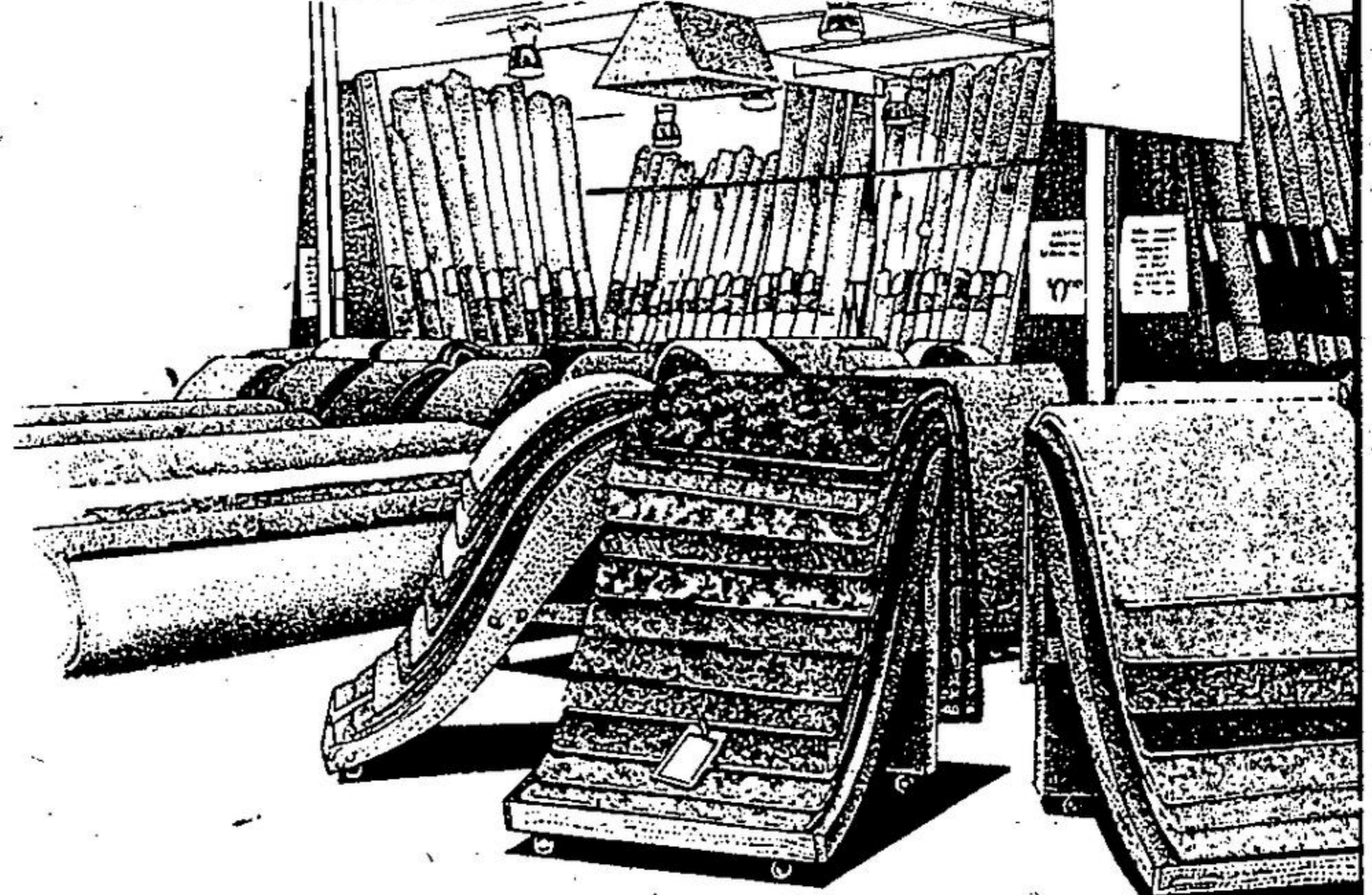
The boys sleep in tents under starry skies, weather permitting. They meet new friends, acquire new skills and gain a better appreciation of the natural world.

East session starts on Sunday afternoon and goes right through to the following Friday night with a closing campfire. The cost is \$160 per session, including the tuck fee.

To enroll your son or to get more information, please call the Burlington Scout office at 637-2526.

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