

People are looking for someone to yell at, MP says

Garth Turner
MP
Halton-Peel



Town Hall meeting number six was a half-hour away. Dorothy and I arrived a bit early outside the Belfountain Community Hall, then decided to drive down to the river for a few minutes.

We pulled into a private laneway to turn around, and met another car. The driver stopped and motioned for me to open the window, which I did. I smiled and said hello.

"I'm on my way to your meeting, Turner," he said, "and I'm going to give you s... We're all going to the poorhouse because of you, and the best thing that can happen is that you won't be around any more."

Then, with a woman beside him in the car, he spun his tires and took off.

I didn't know this man; had never seen him before; and a few minutes later I'd be standing in front of a hall full of people looking towards him in the third row.

Dorothy and I went on down to the river, and she had tears in her eyes. She said it was hard to understand why something like that would happen, and I told her to forget it - the man in the car was not attacking me, he was just yelling at a politician.

I've been a Member of Parliament for about eight months and in that short time have learned so many things. Among them, I now know there are a lot of people who are cynical and bitter and mistrustful. They want someone to blame and stereotype and be angry at. Politicians are fair game, I guess. You don't need to be civil to a politician. You can yell. You can

make his wife cry without feeling bad.

The Belfountain meeting was loud and intense - and it was typical of the five which had gone before. As I've said, it is not easy to stand up before taxpayers after the finance minister has introduced new tax measures - but it's the right thing to do. Only by spending night after night going across this area can I know exactly what message it is I should be taking back to Michael Wilson.

It's not been my role to sell the tax changes, rather to explain them and why all this is happening. Our Town Hall meetings have focused first on the anger many people feel about any perceived tax hike, and then on ways this country can start climbing out of the horrible debt it's accumulated.

At the very end of the Belfountain meeting I was asked what my message to Wilson would be, and it was easy to answer.

I sense a grudging acceptance of a consumption tax, I said, as an alternative to higher income taxes. But this acceptance will likely only come if four conditions are met.

(1) The government gets serious about spending cuts.

(2) The new tax is completely fair, and at the lowest possible rate.

(3) Any extra money raised is applied directly to reducing the deficit.

(4) Consumers get a watchdog agency to protect them as the new tax comes into effect.

So far, that's the message - but I am not finished in my quest to learn how most people in our area are reacting to Wilson's proposals.

Soon every house will receive a 20-page guide to the Goods and Services Tax which I just wrote. There's no government propaganda in there, and no attempt to persuade you that this is a great idea. But there are explanations of why Ottawa thinks the tax should happen, along with a response sheet for you to tell me what you think.

Frankly, I hope to get thousands of these responses back. The more I get, the better case I can build in Ottawa for the kinds of changes or modifications you want - so please read the guide, and then mail your thoughts to me.

In addition, I've established a Halton-Peel Tax Committee, and these citizens will be holding two public meetings on the GST. The idea is to get as much public input as possible, before they make a report to the House of Commons finance committee, which is holding hearings into the tax.

If you'd like to appear before the tax committee, then please make an effort to come out and say your piece. In Bolton the meeting is set for 7 p.m., Sept. 26 at the Albion-

Bolton community centre. In Georgetown, the committee meets at the Cultural Centre, 7 p.m. on Sept. 28.

Clearly, these are not the easiest of times to be an MP. It takes a while to cope with being a lightning-rod for other people's emotions. Sometimes it's frustrating walking the line between a huge and slow-moving bureaucracy on one hand and a charged-up room of citizens on the other. All I can do, I guess, is my best.

Part of that is having had some frank conversations in Ottawa with

Michael Wilson, telling him the feds are not yet doing their part - we need more spending cuts. We need better examples of leadership, whether it's on the environment or the economy.

I have assurances that will happen, and soon.

Meanwhile, keep yelling at me.

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