

Parliament will be 'explosive'

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OTTAWA-Well, I'm back here for what promises to be an explosive session in the House of Commons - featuring sales tax reform, abortion legislation, government spending cutbacks, the possible privatization of Canada Post and a whole raft of other things.

The committee I am chairman of will be tackling ways the feds can slash spending, because that's one topic which was raised over and over again during the summer. Of course, I'm writing another report for Michael Wilson on changes I think he should make to the GST-like cutting out some exemptions, lowering the rate, beefing up the watchdog agency and targetting big reductions in the deficit.

Everybody here knows the next few months will not be easy. Interesting, but not easy. The government has some tough things to try and get through the House and the committees. Hopefully the session will end up accomplishing some good, despite the clouds of partisan rhetoric ready to dump on Ottawa.

There are a bunch of powerful images, though, that I'm bringing back here with me. One of them came from Georgetown's

Memorial Arena last Thursday morning.

There I saw a thousand public school kids stream in, all wearing T-shirts with big red chickens on them. There was enough energy in that room to power up the Pickering nuclear plant - and the volume of background noise had the adults shouting at each other.

For an hour the kids alternatively listened quietly, thundered out responses, clapped, stuck their hands in the air and sang. This was an amazing rally - organized by the Georgetown Optimist Club and designed to raise awareness of the evils of drugs.

Standing there talking to these nine and 10-year-olds I found it hard to believe they could be threatened by the flow into Canada of crack and cocaine. They seemed so young, and so small. But here we all were, trying to tell them not to get started sticking needles into their arms, smoke in their lungs or powder in their noses.

The Optimists deserve a tremendous amount of credit for the program, and I was honored to be a part. As a society, however, we all have to stop this monster in its tracks - because only if the demand for drugs dries up will the supply also wither. It's hard to believe what's going on in New Brunswick now, as the police hunt for heavily-armed South American drug traffickers - whose dope will end up in the bodies of Southern Ontario school kids.

In talking with senior officers for Halton Regional Police it's clear this is happening. Wherever you want to find drugs, they tell me,

you can.

The situation is not restricted to Halton, of course. Talk to any officer on the Peel force and you'll get an even more vivid description of the horrors now just spreading among our youth. Hiding our eyes from the problem won't solve it - the Optimists know that. It's a sad commentary, but only by talking straight to these kids when they are in grade four can we hope to keep their eyes clear and resolve strong three or four years later.

There's obviously more the feds can do - like enhance drug enforcement through the RCMP, and encourage a far-reaching national educational program. After looking into all those young faces, I'm sure a lot more aware of the need to push for these things here in Ottawa.

But as parents, community leaders and simply responsible people, we have the immediate responsibility of protecting our community, and our kids, from the addiction others would impose.

I hope the Optimist program spreads to every one of the communities in the area, and that the simple message is on every pair of innocent lips: Just say no.

A lot of what happens here in Ottawa is about the future - trying to plan the economy, trying to protect the environment, trying political solutions to social problems. There is nothing so oriented to that future as our children, and nothing on which the future is more dependent. I've come back here with that sea of faces forever etched in my mind.

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