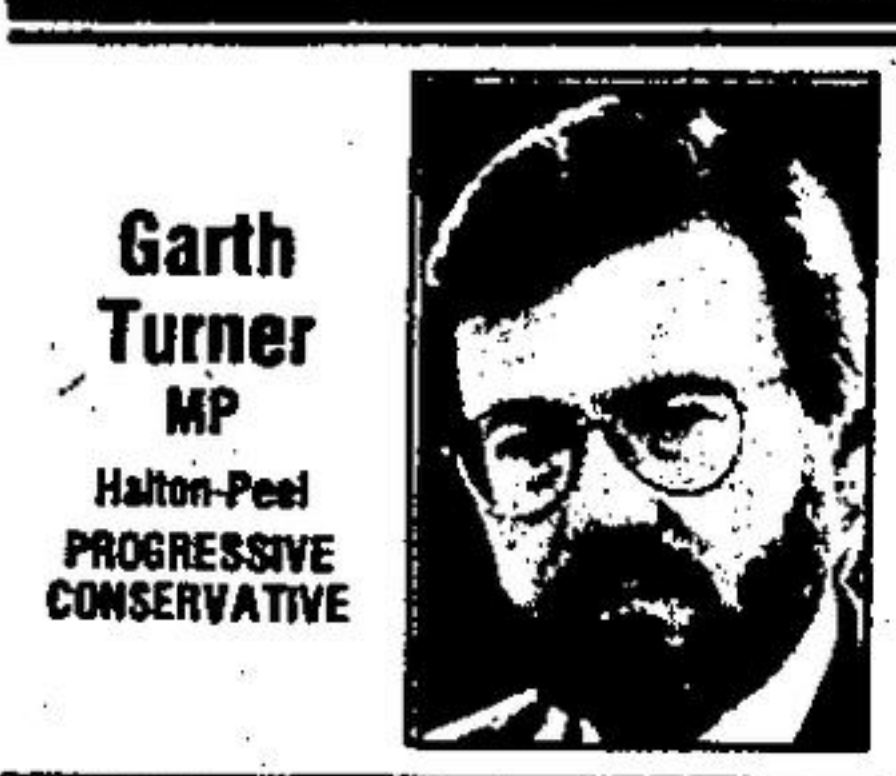


MP has no 'twin brother'



Q: How do you tell when a politician's lying?
A: When his lips move.

—Press Gallery Joke

I'm beginning to understand why politicians have a bad reputation. When they cut spending, politicians are yelled at for being uncaring and heartless and for putting policies ahead of people.

And when politicians raise taxes to cover spending they're called arrogant and irresponsible and destroyers of the middle class.

Three weeks ago we had a federal budget which cut spending. Immediately, two provinces took the feds to court over that fact. Women's groups (who saw a spending cut) have declared war on Ottawa. The cancellation of building an icebreaker had people in Vancouver screaming at their local Tory MPs. I'm just glad the ship wasn't being built in Caledon East.

Meanwhile there's an outcry over the proposed GST. There would be a similar howl if income taxes were going up. Of course, we all know the national debt will cost \$40 billion in interest this year, and the money has to come from somewhere. But the feds can't cut spending, and they can't raise taxes - at least not according to the critics.

So, the government just takes it in the neck.

Me, too.

A letter to the local press last week sums it up nicely. "A minute of silence please," wrote Bruce Crozier, of Georgetown, "for the passing away of a common friend. The man was a voice for the common people, a man who shared our hopes and our dreams, and battled

our arrogant leaders in the goal of making Canada a better country.

"His twin brother is just doing fine, thanks. It seems he has a new job in Ottawa representing the good people of Halton-Peel. Physically he is a twin to his brother but he seems to lack his brother's rebellious nature. Sure, he puts in a lot of time for his riding, but when push comes to shove, his message to his co-workers comes out a little weak."

Well, Bruce Crozier was, of course, talking about me. And I actually liked his letter. In fact, I can understand why he wrote it. His letter went on to ask why I'm not at Michael Wilson's throat over the GST. Crozier also wants to see deeper spending cuts, although he doesn't spell them out. And he asks for some of my "old spark."

Now I can take a lot of criticism, and I know it comes with the job. But, Bruce, news of my passing is just a tad premature.

I haven't changed. What has changed are my tactics. I don't have to yell any more when I'm in the same room as the decision makers. In fact, yelling would just guarantee that the political gods wouldn't listen. I just don't see how I could work for changes to the tax or the system or the budget or anything if I were locked out of the process.

Do I vote against the GST? Do I vote against spending cuts? Do I vote to defeat the government? What are the alternatives?

Bruce, if you know me, you know I want a Canada which does not continue to spiral into debt. I want a future with lower taxes and money for things like the environment. I want less government, not more. Sure, I want less spending and an end to all stupid spending. But I want to achieve that without throwing the country into a recession or cutting social programs.

So I made the decision to work with Wilson, not against him. I

decided to help him find ways of spending less and working to lower the deficit. I gave him advice on the GST - ways to make it fairer and especially ways to safeguard consumers.

He listened to some of it, and I'm pleased with that. But there are more changes I want to see take place. He knows, and he is still listening. As long as that continues, then I have a hope of getting those changes through.

Those who want me to quit the Tory caucus, sit as an independent and oppose these measures must realize their MP would be without influence, without power, without colleagues and without a hope of changing anything.

Maybe I'm wrong, but I don't sense most people desire that. The public meetings I've had have given a strong signal that people in Georgetown and Bolton and Acton and Belfountain want their MP to be inside government, working for solid middle class values - lower, more responsible spending; fewer handouts to special interest groups; fair taxes; common sense policies; and equality for all.

And I will try to be that man. Right now is not an easy time to be doing this. The government has wiped out in public opinion polls. It's doing unpopular things - cutting spending and raising taxes. The critics are everywhere and some days my mail is not a pretty sight.

I don't agree with everything the government does. As I've said before, I refuse to be a cheerleader for Ottawa. But what I agree with I'll support. And what I can change, well, I'll try.

The GST should be on everything in the economy, at a lower rate, with the provinces co-operating, with minimal paperwork for businesses and without thousands of new collectors. It should also come with a mechanism to guarantee that savings when the

existing tax is scrapped are passed on to consumers.

If those conditions could be met, the tax would be a far superior tool than income tax.

But, Bruce, you say that's just your point?

Well, it's mine, too. But I stand a hell of a lot better chance of getting these changes by working within the system rather than yelling at it.

That may not make headlines. I think it makes sense.

While we're on the topic of things to change, a couple spring to my mind.

I think it was outrageous for the National Gallery of Canada to spend \$1.8 million in tax money buying "Voice of Fire," which is a big, boring painting. It consists of three vertical lines and was, to make matters worse, painted by an American. Why not spend the money at art auctions buying classic Canadian paintings, so they can be seen by all Canadians, not just wealthy private collectors?

And, finally, a word on the RCMP and turbans.

I have said in public that the tradition of the RCMP uniform is worth preserving. I've also said we have so few national symbols that it seems wrong to abandon any.

And I said I opposed altering that uniform for any reason, including the Sikh religion. I still feel that way. Yes, I understand both sides of the argument, and I know the government's action will be taken most kindly in ethnic communities. I also know many traditions of the past - like not allowing treaty Indians to vote - were wrong.

But I am proud of that uniform. It says "Canada."

You may not read about me in the newspapers, screaming at the government. Just remember that doesn't mean it doesn't happen.

Mark Lafleur toastmasters' speech winner

Mark Lafleur of the Eighth Line in Georgetown, is the winner of the annual Canada Day speech contest held by the local Toastmasters Club on March 12 at the Glen Williams Town Hall. Mr. Lafleur will be representing the Halton Hills Toastmasters Club at the area contest to be hosted by Milton Toastmasters Club on Tuesday, March 27. The Milton club meet at the Bayerischer Hof Restaurant, 324 Steeles Ave., Milton, every Tuesday at 8 p.m. and the public is invited. In addition, the Halton Hills Toastmasters Club will also be represented at the area level by Mr. John Banton as winner of the international speech contest and by Mr. Chris Miller, winner of the evaluation contest.

Toastmasters International is a non-profit, non-partisan, non-sectarian, educational organization that provides its members with a program in communication and leadership development.

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