

Elliot and Whiting trade verbal punches

By LISA RUTLEDGE
The Herald

Another round has begun in the provincial election ring and candidates are throwing punches over tax increases.

In a press release outlining concerns about 33 tax increases over the past five years, Halton North Progressive Conservative candidate, Dave Whiting has labelled Halton North Liberal MPP Walt Elliot "a politician who never met a tax he didn't like."

Mr. Elliot has personally voted in favor of at least 28 tax increases, said Mr. Whiting in a telephone interview with the Herald. Saying that there comes a time when enough is enough, Mr. Whiting said an elected MPP should vote against tax increases if the members of his riding oppose the increase, emphasizing that is the way the elective process is supposed to work.

These allegations are surprising to Mr. Elliot. "What it shows is a real lack of understanding of how

the process works at Queen's Park," said Mr. Elliot. A member of government has to vote for a tabled money bill or that member won't be in government anymore, explained Mr. Elliot. "Anyone who understands the government should know that." The only choice for a politician is to be absent during the vote on a money bill, he said.

All concerns about money bills are discussed at Liberal caucus, said Mr. Elliot. For example, he explained that Treasurer Robert Nixon will discuss expectations surrounding a proposed money bill and will speak with MPPs 15 at a time. But once a money bill is tabled Liberal members are expected to vote in favor of that bill, said Mr. Elliot.

Although there is the option of being absent from voting, Mr. Elliot insists he is obligated to vote. "And once inside you're going to have to vote yes or no," he said.

Mr. Elliot described the allega-

tions of overbearing tax increases as "nonsense" and believes Mr. Whiting is "shooting his own credibility down" by making them part of his election platform.

Mr. Whiting's attacks on tax increases is surprising for a candidate running the second time, said Mr. Elliot, because "for someone trying to be in a senior level of government should at least understand how the government works."

If an MPP is elected to represent constituents and those constituents are in strong opposition to an issue then that MPP has an obligation to fight for the people he represents and not to toe the party line, believes Mr. Whiting. "You have to answer to the people who put you in there," he insists.

"If Mr. Elliot thinks I don't understand the government process then my answer to that is that he doesn't understand how the elective process works," said Mr. Whiting. "You have to answer to the people who put you in there," he said.

Taxation is still the most prominent issue among people who are now paying half of their income to the government, insists Mr. Whiting. "If Mr. Elliot doesn't think so he's sadly out of touch with his riding. People are fed up to death of paying taxes without getting anything in return."

"In the five years that Mr. Elliot's party has been in power, the amount of tax collected by the Peterson Liberals from each Halton North resident has increased to about \$3,580 a year from about \$1,687 - a 112 per cent increase," Mr. Whiting explained in the release. "Over the same period of time, per capital income in Halton North has increased by only 52 per cent," he stated in the release.

Promising that a PC government will develop "common sense" solutions, Mr. Whiting said in the release bringing "fiscal responsibility" back to government spending policies will eliminate problems.

Blaming management of funding priorities, Mr. Whiting stated in his release that "the PC party has consistently opposed Liberal efforts to increase taxes ... to avoid making tough decisions on spending."

Businesses need support

In order to support the North Halton business community, both the Liberal and New Democratic Party local candidates in the upcoming provincial election, Walt Elliot and Noel Duignan, agree the role of the provincial government MP is to help businesses cut through the "bureaucratic red tape" that makes it so difficult for businesses to take action.

As the riding's incumbent, Mr. Elliot said if re-elected he would continue to facilitate negotiations between local businesses wanting to expand the various government approval processes.

Businesses depend on the support of several government agencies before they can take action, said Mr. Elliot. If one agency objects to a proposal if could "kill the idea." "My role, (therefore), is to ensure coordination and cooperation and try to speed up the approval process when possible."

Mr. Duignan said the message he is receiving from the local business community is that they want the government to cut down on the paper work required of them.

Pointing to the provincial government's new commercial concentration tax in the Greater Toronto Area, local Progressive Conservative candidate Dave Whiting said the government's policy of concentrating new road construction in the large urban areas of Toronto and Hamilton is discouraging businesses from moving into Halton Hills.

More businesses would move into the riding, said Mr. Whiting, if they had access to a road system that would allow them to get their

goods to market. The riding is currently more attractive than Toronto for example, because land prices are cheaper, he said.

Mr. Elliot defended the government's transportation policy saying it has spent \$7 billion on road construction. The money has been raised, said Mr. Elliot, by taxing the road users.

Mr. Elliot used a similar argument to defend other tax increases that the other candidates said are placing an unfair burden on local business people. Money raised from new taxes has gone to fund capital projects such as roads and schools and hospital beds, said Mr. Elliot.

Mr. Duignan said the current provincial tax system is placing an unfair tax burden on the small businessman. He pointed to the government's increase of the provincial sales tax from seven to eight per cent. Instead of increasing the sales tax, Mr. Duignan said, it should eventually be eliminated. But when asked how the government would make up for the loss in funds, he would only say that this could only be determined after the entire tax system was reviewed.

Family Coalition Party candidate Giuseppe Gori said the biggest problem facing the business community today is that of double taxation once the Federal Government's Goods and Services Tax, (GST), comes in effect in January.

The next provincial government should work with the federal government to combine the provincial sales tax and the GST into one tax, he said. This would reduce overall taxation, said Mr. Gori.



Despite a late arrival, large crowds met Ontario Premier David Peterson at the Croatian Centre picnic area on his bid to support local Liberals in the provincial election campaign Saturday afternoon. Halton North Liberal MPP, Walt Elliot, helps Mr. Peterson make his way through to a platform under a shelter in the picnic area. (Herald photo)

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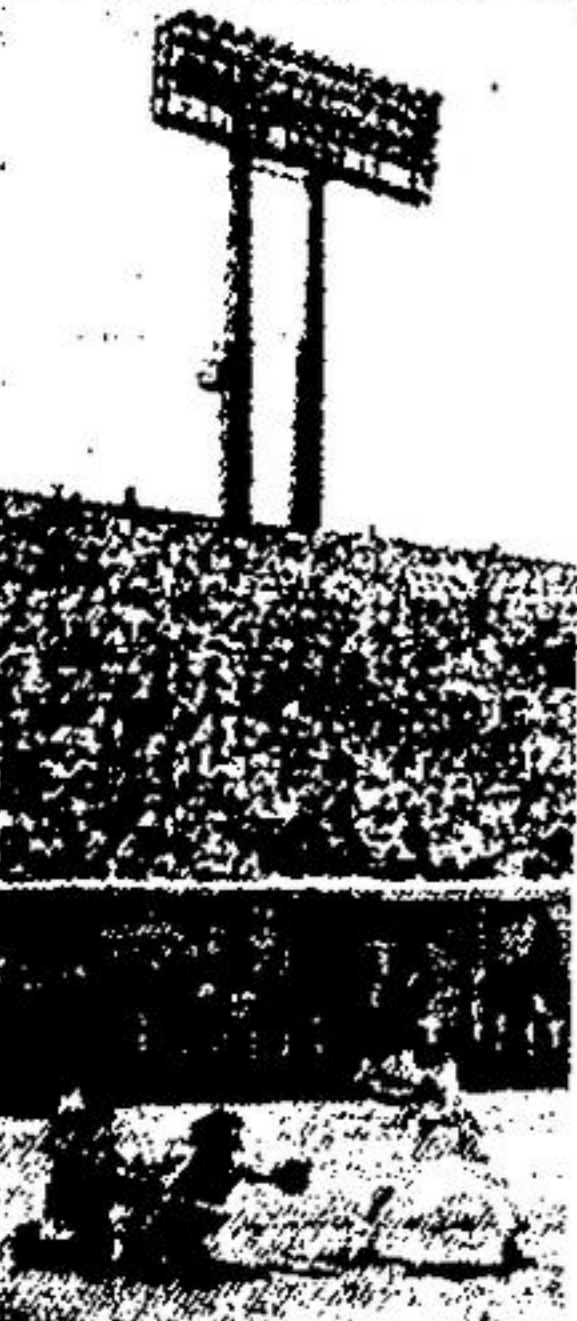
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