

Solutions to problems not always well-received

Being an MP is like having two jobs. Here in the riding it's a matter of solving problems for people, meeting community groups, representing federal policies and listening to local opinion.

In Ottawa it's making laws, voting, debating, battling bureaucrats and trying to influence the political gods who set policies. Some days you win. Some, you crash and burn.

Let me give you a small example

AMO delegates face challenges

Delegates to Ontario's largest municipal gathering, the annual conference of the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO), will be debating a variety of topics including deposits on pop cans, storage of used tires, and the accountability of municipal police forces.

AMO president Grant Hopcroft of London said, "Municipalities have the responsibility and the power to implement many of the changes that large numbers of people want to see in waste management, in protection of the environment and in dealing with our transportation problems. As the public focus increasingly moves to these issues, you will see municipal governments take centre stage.

"Our association, with over 700 individual local governments as members, exists to unite municipalities. In the coming decade, we in municipal government have a tremendous opportunity to get past the financial crises that have been holding us back and become masters in our own house. AMO can be a powerful voice on behalf of municipalities as people across Ontario start to realize what it really means to act locally as well as think globally. Acting locally often means acting through local government."

The AMO annual conference, held at the Royal York Hotel on Aug. 19-22, will have about 1,200 delegates from across the province, elected representatives of 97 per cent of the Ontario population. Several prominent provincial politicians, including John Sweeney, Minister of Housing and Municipal Affairs, and Gerry Phillips Minister of Labour, will address the conference.

Other issues to be discussed at the AMO conference are employment equity, revision of social services, and handicapped parking.

Lung Association to introduce new program

It is a fact that approximately one million Canadians or 4 per cent of the population has asthma.

The Lung Association - Halton Region is taking action now through its new Air Force Asthma Program for children 6 to 12 years of age.

As members of the Air Force, children will investigate asthma; they find the clues or warning signals of their asthma. Children in the program become detectives and gain a better understanding of what happens during an asthma attack. Children who attend the Air Force Asthma Program will be able to manage their own asthma more effectively.

Parents also participate by attending short lectures, demonstrations and group discussions. Guest speakers add their knowledge to the program as well.

The four sessions which comprise the program will be held at the Bennett Health Centre in Georgetown from 7:00-8:30 p.m. on the following dates: September 26th, October 3, October 10th and October 17th. To register or for more information call The Lung Association - Halton 632-8499.

PHOTO REPRINTS
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of what can happen, in Ottawa, to an idea.

It struck me some months ago that if we're ever to cure our debt woes - without raising taxes more - the level of government services must be cut back. And one way of doing that would be to attract more volunteers.

In fact, if we could get more people to donate their time and talents - to the fire department, the ambulance brigade, youth training, seniors care, home nursing, teaching assistants - society could really come out winning.

Volunteers are amazing people. I've seen them at work driving the ambulances in Bolton, putting out fires in Halton Hills, leading the cadets in Acton and working for all the candidates on election campaigns. But, in Canada, there is no special encouragement for being a volunteer.

Under American law, if you suffer out-of-pocket expenses being a volunteer - it could be bus fare or parking or whatever - you can claim that as a tax deduction. The idea behind this is that people who serve in unpaid public service should not be penalized financially.

Garth Turner
MP

Halton-Peel
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A good idea?

I thought it might be, and so I set the wheels in motion to see how Canada might follow suit.

A few days ago, the research report I asked for from the Economics Division of the Library of Parliament arrived. In drawing the information together, research had been done into current U.S. law, Canadian practice now, reaction from volunteer organizations and how the Department of Finance felt about my idea.

The arguments were carefully laid out.

On one hand, giving tax deduc-

tions to volunteers rewards unpaid work that benefit society. It might also increase the number of volunteers. It might even allow these volunteers to start performing work which taxpayers now foot through full-time government workers. It would also send out a signal to people that the government was willing to encourage people to be nice to each other.

Then there was the other hand. My report tells me that all of the above runs counter to "a basic premise in the tax system," namely that tax deductions are normally provided only to cover expenses borne to earn income.

So, if volunteers could claim deductions, then it could come to be used as a form of tax avoidance. Higher-income spouses, for example, could even use it as a form of income-splitting.

Hmmm. Things were getting more complicated.

But the worst was yet to come. Now the boys at the Finance Department had their go at the idea.

Finance came back and said allowing tax deductions for volunteers would impose administrative burdens on everyone. They would cost the feds a lot of

money because nobody seems to believe more volunteers could substitute for some government services. They would impose a new meaning to the word "volunteer."

They told me there's no demonstrated need for more volunteers than we have now. They told me the scheme would create pressure for a refundable tax credit, and would lead to higher-income people benefitting most. And they said it would be impossible, for tax purposes, to define exactly what a "volunteer" was.

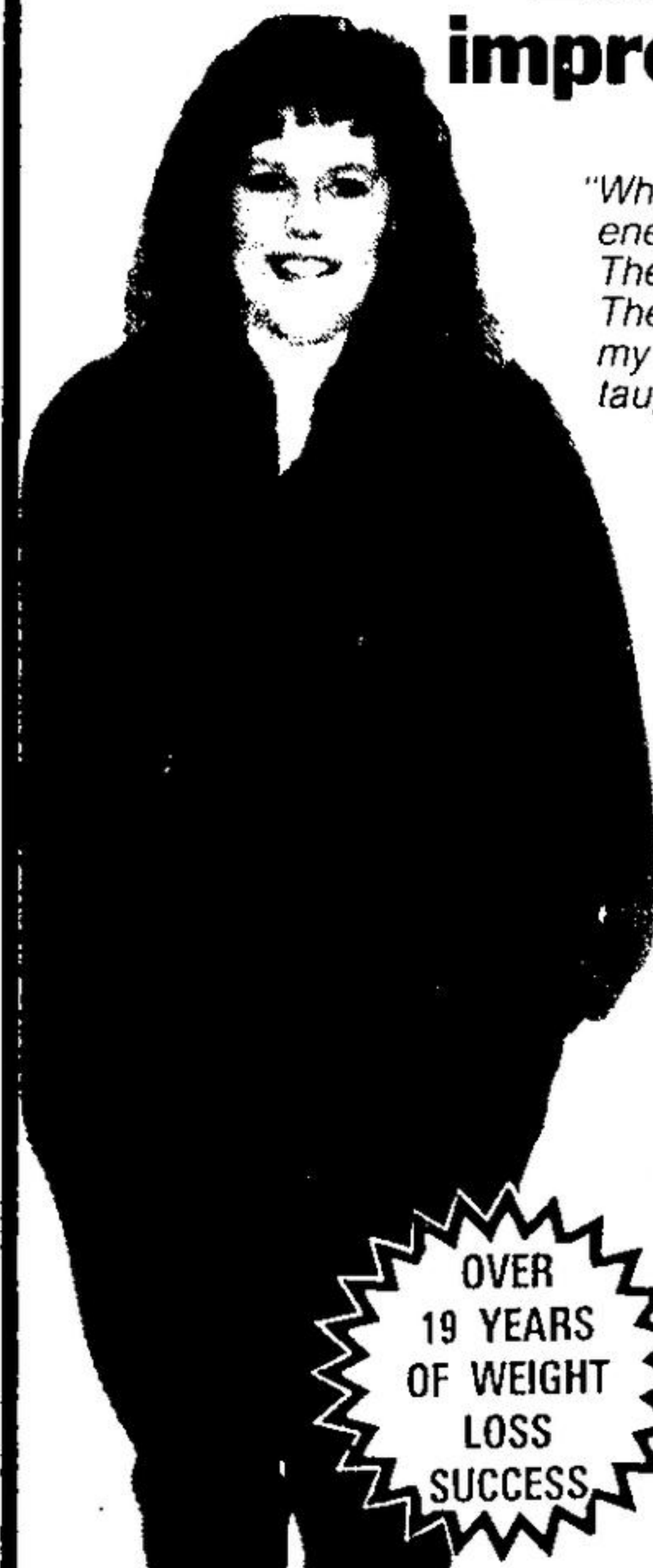
In short, they were not impressed.

And it reminded me of the hassles I got in Ottawa last year when I tried to drum up interest in a replacement for Canada Savings bonds which would be used exclusively to refinance the national debt. If people bought bonds which they knew would go for the purpose, I thought, then they would. No politicians would be able to get their hands on that cash and spend it.

But that didn't fly, either. Well, I shall not give up. We need new ideas, new solutions and new ways to look at the old problems.

If you have any thoughts on any of this, I'd enjoy hearing them.

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