

Partisan politics does not serve the country

If political events in Ottawa last week confused you, join the club. It was not a week I was proud of, as the Senate and the House of Commons pulled out their equivalent of nuclear weapons to fight each other.

The situation is this:

1) The Liberal senators wanted to kill the GST and other things the Commons has passed. Why? Because the government is unpopular and Jean Chretien sniffs power.

2) The prime minister appointed a mess of new Senators so the legislation would pass.

3) The Liberal senators then walked out, so nothing could pass.

4) I came home in disgust.

This is what's called partisan politics. That's when it doesn't matter really what best serves the country. Rather, it's what serves the party you belong to. For the Liberals, they are deliberately blocking legislation that MPs have voted for. For the Tories, it's patronage appointments to stack the Senate and get on with the agenda.

Out of it all we get symbols. For the Liberals, Senator Allan MacEachen is a symbol of the unelected and unaccountable. For the Tories, Senator John Buchanan is a symbol of political patronage that so many people find offensive.

Nobody can win this battle, and it should never have taken place.

The Senate should be reformed or abolished. It should certainly not have the power that it does.

Right now there are a number of things that I voted for which are being held up by the senators. Besides the GST, there's a new law which would make large corporations pay their fair share of taxes.

There's a law to reform the unemployment insurance plan so that instead of paying people not to work, we retrain them.

And there's a package of government restraint measures to reduce federal spending. I support those things. I voted for them. I think the people who sent me to Ottawa as an MP wanted me to work for common sense in government. To my mind, corporate taxes, UI reform and less spending are what you want.

As for the GST, well, lots of people are afraid of it - I know that. But I also know that if we take the invisible taxes of today and make them visible tomorrow, then politicians will have a harder time raising them.

The real point is that the Senate has taken my vote away. There's not much point my travelling to Ottawa every week if these partisan appointed people can just wipe it all out.

So, things have got to change.

The irony is now that Meech Lake failed, the Senate may have to stay the way it is for a long time.

Meech was to bring Quebec back into the constitution. And then the



next phase was to reform the Senate. In fact, a meeting to do that had been scheduled for next month with all the premiers.

Now that we are in a national unity crisis, nobody can know what happens next. Quebec will be coming back with a new list of demands and they are sure to be more than was in Meech.

There are a lot of people in this community who still think Meech was a bad deal; that it gave "too much" to Quebec. There are people who tell me Quebec can take a hike at any time, and that's fine with them.

I don't agree, and think Canada without Quebec is not Canada anymore. But beyond that, if we bust this country up, then we'll never change the Senate. We'll

never be able to put rights for native people in the constitution, either. After Oka, well, that's also a national priority.

And now about private property rights - that should be enshrined too. You and I deserve some protection against governments taking away what we rightfully own. But without all the provinces agreeing, the constitution stays the way it is - flawed and stilted.

I don't know what will happen next. I hope the Senate gives me my vote back - although I don't like the way the joint had to be stacked with more Tories to get it.

On the trip back to Ottawa, I'll be

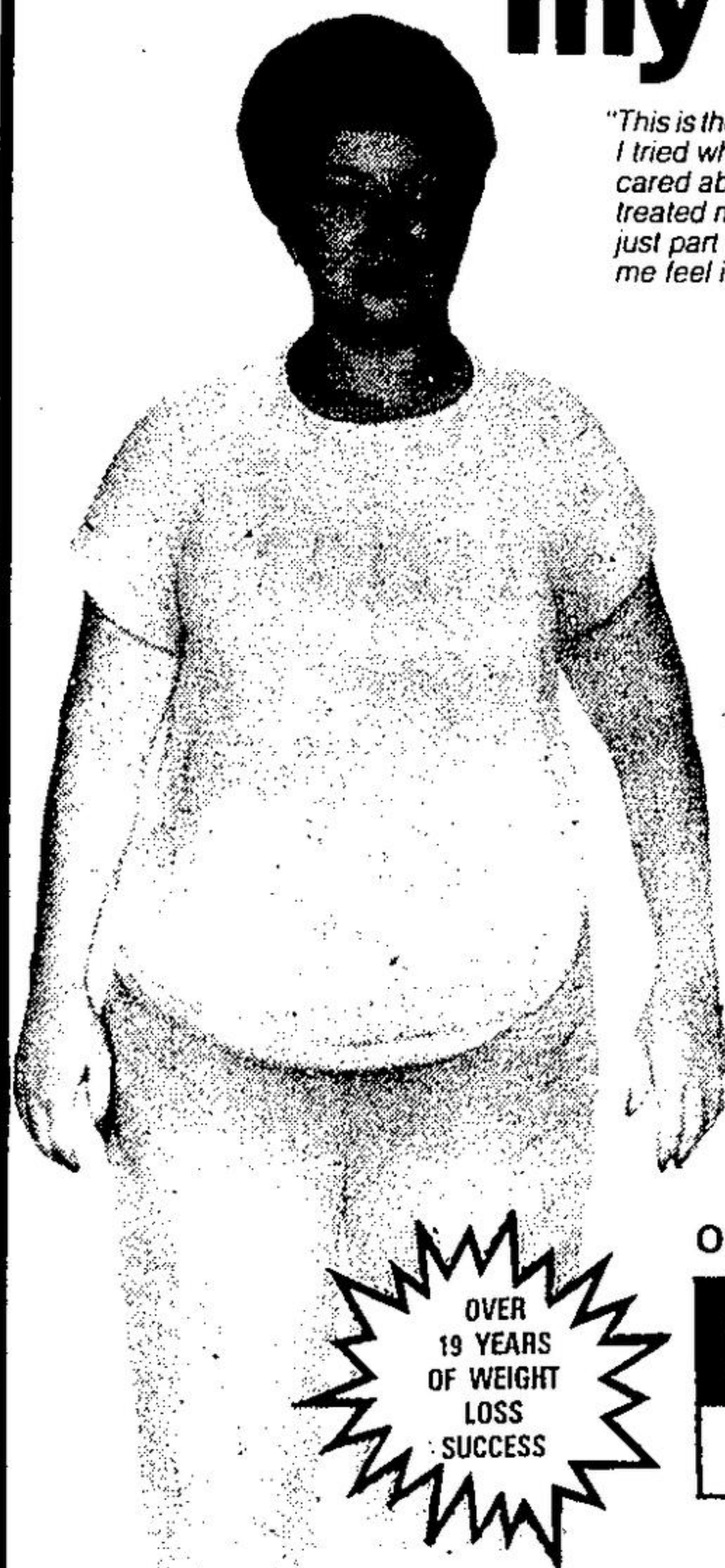
holding my nose.

Thanks to all the kind people who wrote me over the last few days about my resignation as a House of Commons committee chairman.

Yes, the decision was tough - in Ottawa having a title is all anybody cares about. But I think it was the right thing to do. I'm enjoying putting together new policies which will work for families and middle-class taxpayers.

I think because we pay so much of the freight in this country, we deserve to call a few of the shots. More next week.

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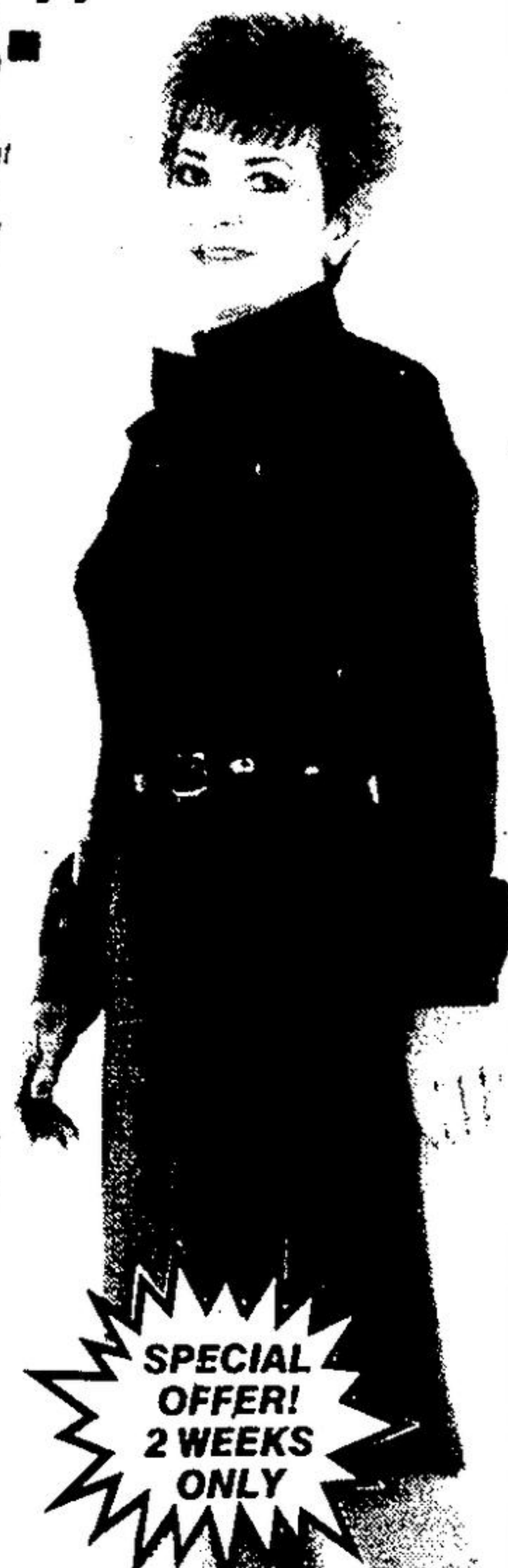
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Special guest speaker

Dr. David Mensah is the scheduled guest speaker for the first in a series of seminars on "Faith and the Environment" presented by Mountainview Baptist Church.

The first seminar is scheduled for tomorrow, (Thursday) at 7:30 p.m. in Georgetown District High School.

Dr. Mensah will also be speaking at Mountainview Baptist Church, Friday at 7:30 p.m., Saturday at 7 p.m. and Sunday at 11 a.m. and 7 p.m.

Further information on the seminars can be obtained by contacting David Caldwell, 873-2184 or Laura Ellison, 873-1328.

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