

## Opinion

## Taxpayers should get involved with issues

In today's issue of the Herald my editor Colin Gibson predicts in his editorial that Halton Hills Councillors will anger local taxpayers whether they raise the 1991 tax rate enough to maintain existing services or they keep the tax increase rate in line with inflation by cutting services. His point is well taken, but I argue that this "damned if you do damned if you don't" scenario can and should be avoided as long as councillors act responsibly and taxpayers take the time to inform council what kind of services they think the town needs.

In response to a budget direction report presented to Council last Monday some of the councillors got up and flatly stated they won't be supporting a tax increase for 1991 that isn't in line with the inflation

rate or approximately five per cent. This is nothing more than political grandstanding. "Look at me aren't I responsible to the taxpayer." On the contrary statements like this are nothing more than irresponsible rhetoric.

Unlike some councillors, Acton councillor Norm Elliot was right when he said there is no point deciding now what is an acceptable tax rate increase until council knows what town services will have to be cut to allow for only a five per cent tax increase.

To do otherwise would only mislead the public. By making statements now that only a five per cent tax rate increase is acceptable tells the public that the council realizes the ramifications of its actions and has decided the public



Ben's Banter

By Ben Dummett

will be agreeable to the necessary cuts in service. But when the cuts are made and councillors must answer to the general public for their support of the minimal increase they will have no one but themselves to blame if taxpayers

are angered.

Not only must councillors act responsibly to ensure an appropriate tax increase is approved but also, taxpayers must inform councillors what services they think would justify a suitable tax hike. It's not enough to just say "we won't accept anything more than a five per cent tax increase." Inevitably it's the very people who demand a minimal tax increase without first knowing the ramifications that complain when services are reduced.

The public should make a point of attending at least one of the towns budget committee meetings which are set to get under way within the next while. Attendance at these meetings will allow taxpayers to understand what ser-

VICES will be affected by certain tax increases. In turn they will be able to make realistic suggestions to council in regards what, if any, services should be cut. Even if people can't get out to any of the meetings they should at least contact their town representative to find out the issues.

Those who don't get involved in the process and are subsequently dissatisfied with the end result have no one to blame but themselves.

Councillors and the general public agree that the 1991 tax increase can't be as high as it has been in previous years. But the only way an all-around acceptable tax increase can be achieved is if everyone participates in the process.

## Party-time for New Democrats at Queen's Park

By PAULINE JOHNSON  
Queen's Park Bureau

TORONTO - Hundreds of people hooted, hollered and whistled Monday as Ontario Premier Bob Rae introduced his Cabinet, nearly half of whom are women.

Rae, the province's 21st premier, and the 25 members of his cabinet were sworn into office at the University of Toronto's gothic Convocation Hall, while many who watched had tears in their eyes at the sight of the first New Democratic Party government in Ontario's history.

As well as the estimated 1,800 people watching inside the overflowing hall, hundreds more listened on public address systems from the lawns outside or watched on live television.

"I cannot promise you a government without mistakes, I can't even promise you a premier without mistakes, we can only try to be a government that admits its mistakes as openly and honestly as we can, and then carries on with

the job," said Rae in his first speech after being sworn into office.

"Our task is to set taxes fairly, to spend wisely, to fight inequality, to promote justice and to guard against institutional arrogance and the abuse of power wherever we may find it," he said.

The recession which has fallen upon Ontario can be beaten, Rae said. He called on labour, business and the entire community to plan and work together to build a partnership for economic recovery.

But, he said, "no one government can spend its way out of a recession. That's been tried before and it hasn't worked but that's not an excuse for doing nothing and for inactivity.

"What we must do as a province, and we shall be doing this, is seeing how can we invest most wisely in the future of this province and we shall be discussing with all of the other partners as to how we can do it," he said.

The cabinet sworn in yesterday,

in front of Lt.-Gov. Lincoln Alexander and Secretary to Cabinet Peter Barnes, has 11 women, more than any in the history of the Ontario cabinet. Women will be represented equally on the policy and priorities and management board committees of cabinet, Rae pledged.

He said that two of his government's major commitments were to equality and to negotiating self-governing agreements for native peoples "that will have meaning in this term of office."

Watching from nearby on the stage was his choice of ministers which includes six northerners: Floyd Laughren (Nickel Belt) as the Deputy Premier and Treasurer; Howard Hampton (Rainy River) as Attorney General; Bud Wildman (Algoma) as Minister of Natural Resources with responsibility for Native Affairs; Gilles Pouliot (Lake Nipigon) as Minister of Mines and with responsibility for Francophone Affairs; Shelley Martel

(Sudbury East) as Minister of Northern Development and Government House Leader; and Shelley Wark-Martyn (Port Arthur) as Minister of Revenue.

The swearing-in of Rae and the individual ministers started off with laughter as the Toronto Intergeneration Choir led into its first song: "We Ain't Got a Barrel of Money, maybe we're ragged and funny, but we're rolling along, singing a song, side by side."

The ceremony was frequently interrupted with cheers and whistles, standing ovations and even yells at various ministers of "Way to go Mum, or Dad."

Leading the cheers were such well-known figures as former Ontario NDP Leader and Ambassador to the United Nations Stephen Lewis and his wife, writer Michelle Landsberg, federal NDP Leader Audrey McLaughlin, Manitoba NDP Leader Gary Doer and Bob White, president of the Canadian Auto Workers Union.

Other members of the 35th Ontario parliament cabinet included

Hamilton MPPs Bob Mackenzie as Minister of Labour, and Richard Allen as Minister of Colleges, Universities and Skills Development. Windsor MPP Dave Cooke was made Minister of Housing and Municipal Affairs and, as expected, Ruth Grier (Etobicoke-Lakeshore) landed the Environment Ministry portfolio.

Peter Kormos (Welland-Thorold), well-known for his fight against the threshold no-fault auto insurance bill was made Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs and Minister of Financial Institutions, while Cambridge's Mike Farnan was made Solicitor General and Minister of Correction Services with responsibility for the Anti-Drug Strategy.

Rookies appointed to the cabinet include Peterborough MPP Jenny Carter as Minister of Energy, Hastings-Peterborough MPP Elmer Buchanan as Agriculture Minister and Niagara South MPP Shirley Coppen as Minister without Portfolio and Chief Government Whip.

## Chretien losing support of the people

OTTAWA - The way Jean Chretien tells it, he decided to seek an early entry into Parliament because he's basically a House of Commons man impatient to get into the thick of things.

As most politicians are wont to do, the Liberal leader might have been gilding the lily just a bit. What he could have said is that, his own feelings aside, his fellow Grits were putting unbearable pressure on him to take a seat in the House.

Things have not worked out exactly as planned since Mr. Chretien won the party leadership last June 23. His original idea was to lie low during the summer - which he did - and then spend the rest of this year, and part of 1991, rebuilding the party's grassroots and trying to eliminate its troublesome \$4-million debt.

His advisers, who had so carefully plotted the strategy leading to his runaway victory in June, were convinced that Mr. Chretien's popularity would remain high for the first year, even with little exposure. And when he did finally seek a seat in Parliament, they reasoned, his fresh-face image would carry over to the next election.

In the meantime, they thought, Prime Minister Brian Mulroney and New Democratic Party Leader Audrey McLaughlin would absorb all the flak from a very critical and complaining public.

But those terrible public opinion polls kept rearing their ugly heads. And the latest one was the final straw.

## FREE FALL.

What that poll indicated is that Mr. Chretien's popularity is falling faster than that of both Mr. Mulroney and Ms. McLaughlin.



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Service

You might even say he's in a free fall. For a freshly minted leader, this is unusual.

What's even more unusual is the Liberal leader's standing in his native province of Quebec. There, pollsters found that only 13 per cent of respondents approve of Mr. Chretien's performance while 74 per cent disapprove.

Even allowing for his opposition to the Meech Lake Accord, these figures represent a remarkable rejection of the veteran populist politician. It also helps explain why, at this particular time, Mr. Chretien has selected a New Brunswick riding for his attempted re-entry into Parliament. He should be home safely in Beauséjour, a riding that's been a Grit stronghold for 55 years.

How this will affect his popularity in Quebec - where he vows to run in the next general election - remains to be seen. But there are many Liberals who doubt whether he could win in his home province at the moment.

There are also some Liberals who have doubts about how the leader will perform in Parliament against Mr. Mulroney. Despite all the talk of him being a House of

Commons man, Mr. Chretien's reputation is built around his performance as a minister - a defender, not an attacker.

## NOT DISTINGUISHED

In the nearly two years, late 1984 to mid-1986, when he was the opposition external affairs critic, Mr. Chretien did not distinguish himself. His apparent lack of intensity, or interest, was attributed to the fact that, just having been defeated for the leadership by John Turner, he no longer had his heart in the job.

In any event, he didn't participate frequently in the daily

question period and he seldom attended committee meetings, even those dealing with external affairs.

He now claims to be raring to go, eager to clash directly with the prime minister. But, up until recently, when caucus pressure became intense, his eagerness didn't seem to have any immediacy. It was more of a long-term objective.

One thing is sure - he will be under severe scrutiny the moment he enters the Commons. The Liberals are not happy with the opinion polls, particularly at a time when the Mulroney govern-

ment appears so vulnerable.

So, not only were caucus members adamant in demanding their leader join them in Parliament, they also insist that he perform well. Despite a high degree of personal popularity, Mr. Chretien has not yet convinced all Liberals that he is the man to lead them to victory. The image of "yesterday's man" still hovers around him, and his MP's want it dispelled quickly.

To start the process, he must be in Parliament, where he can at least get media exposure. Whether he really wants to fight a bye-election this soon is beside the point - the man simply had no choice.

## Buchanan to protect farmers

By ROB SAVAGE

Toronto Bureau  
Thomson News Service

TORONTO - Agriculture must be protected from the harms caused by free trade, Agriculture Minister Elmer Buchanan said Monday.

Buchanan, 43, the Hastings-Peterborough MPP who was sworn in as agriculture minister on Monday, said in an interview he hopes to introduce measures to protect farmers. He said the industry is suffering under free trade with the U.S.

"We have to do something. Otherwise I'm afraid we're going to lose agriculture as a main part of our economy.

"We have to find something to help agriculture across the province."

Buchanan wasn't offering any specific solutions. But he was confident he could work with agriculture interest groups to find

the best solutions.

The MPP was one of 26 NDP members sworn into the new Ontario cabinet during ceremonies in Toronto. About 1,800 people attended the event, which saw 11 women sworn into the cabinet.

Buchanan, the former vice-principal of North Hastings Secondary School, was raised on a farm and said he is familiar with farming issues. The Hastings resident's experience includes working as the founding chairman of North Hastings Children's Services.

He said he hopes to give agriculture a higher profile in Ontario, although he didn't have a specific solution for achieving that end.

"I wouldn't want to say what my priorities would be at this point until I talk to some other people."

Ontario's new premier, Bob Rae, told the audience attending the Toronto celebrations that his

government would be more open. He said the government would make mistakes, but would be willing to admit to them.

"Our greatest challenge, above all, is to win the trust of Ontario citizens," Rae said.

However, there were signs the government wasn't quite ready to fully open itself. Some ministers interviewed after the ceremonies were reluctant to discuss NDP policies.

Peterborough's Jenny Carter, the new energy minister, was faced with concerns about nuclear energy. During the swearing-in ceremonies at the University of Toronto's Convocation Hall, one group hung a banner saying "No need for nuclear."

But Carter wasn't going to discuss it.

"I'm not going to say anything about policy today. Today is a day for celebrations."