

Ottawa Report

Time to take integrated look at taxes

Taxes - too many of them; too complex and too high.

We live in a small country of 26 million people, with the second highest standard of living, and that is very expensive. This is one reason why taxes are high.

But there are other reasons - waste and inefficiency. Duplication of services among levels of government. And especially, the federal debt - which sucks off almost 40 per cent of all our tax dollars in interest.

There was almost a tax revolt in Caledon earlier this year over property taxes. And local taxes in Halton Region went up \$5 million last year. Meanwhile federal and provincial taxes keep on rising - both governments have had over 30 tax increases in the past five years.

Where is it going to end? I had an interesting experience a few days ago that I'd like to share with you.

Kent County is a couple of hours west down the 401, and in that county is the small town of Blenheim (4,500 people). Property taxes went up from 40 per cent to 130 per cent this year, and that triggered a tax revolt. A group of business people actually refused to pay their taxes.

The town faced a cash crunch and, in the face of revolting taxpayers, council passed a resolu-

tion to freeze tax rates. They are also talking about the possibility of a referendum which would pose the question of never raising taxes more than the inflation rate.

In went to Blenheim for two days - to talk to the tax revolt leaders, have a day-long Town Hall meeting, and then write a report on this revolt for Michael Wilson. There was some yelling, and some tears. And for almost six hours, people in the high school auditorium told me of their frustrations. What happened there, I decided, could happen here, or in any other town in the country.

What I found was an attitude that people don't mind paying taxes, if they can see that those taxes are fair. They can understand the need, for example, to pay down the national debt or to support education and health care.

But what they can't understand is why there is so much duplication in government. Why does each township need to have its own road graders? Why have two educational systems evolved in Ontario, both funded by the provincial government? Why will we have two sales taxes after the GST comes in - why can't the feds and the provinces combine them? Why are taxes always going up,

per cent more this year. The Region of Halton spent 13.3 per cent more last year.

These are all reasons why taxes are high, and getting higher.

The federal government will spend \$106 billion this year. The provinces will spend \$165 billion - and increase that spending at twice the rate of inflation.

And think about the debt that governments have run up. The federal debt is worth \$14,062 per Canadian. The Ontario provincial debt is worth another \$7,195 per citizen. And all of that costs money in interest - which has to be paid either with tax dollars or new borrowing.

This is the plan: Right now the federal government takes in \$12 billion more in taxes than it spends, and this surplus is used to pay part of the interest on the debt. With more spending cuts and the GST, this surplus will rise, so that in 1994 we should have enough to pay all the interest on the debt.

So, if Michael Wilson stays on track, in four years we will have no deficit, and will actually start paying off the debt.

But this does not come easily. People don't like the thought of paying the GST. All the special interest groups that get federal money don't like the idea of more spending cuts. There are those who opposed VIA Rail cuts, and the plan to sell Petro-Can, cut-backs in unemployment insurance and clawbacks of pensions.

But what are the alternatives? Taxes can't keep rising forever - and more tax revolts are probably just around the corner.

Maybe it's time we took an integrated look at taxes, because payments to all these levels of government come out of the same pocket. And maybe it's time to end some of the costly duplication.

I'll be having Town Hall meetings on this in a few weeks. Let's work together for more common sense in the tax system.

Garth Turner MP
Halton-Peel
PROGRESSIVE
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even when the population stays the same, or even declines?

People here in Halton Hills and Caledon are asking the same questions. Politicians at all levels have to stand and answer.

Federal spending this year is \$3.2 billion higher than last year - with \$3 billion of that going for increases to pensions, family allowances and unemployment payments. Ontario spending is up about 9 per cent, while Ottawa's spending is up 3 per cent. The town of Blenheim is spending 10.8

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