

## Columnists

# Ratepayers association should be more proactive

A local ratepayers association should be more proactive in its attempt to influence future development in Halton Hills if it wants wide-sweeping public support. That's what one town resident argued at the Residents Active in Development Decisions (R.A.I.D.D.) sponsored public information meeting last Wednesday.

And he's right. It's easy to criticize but a lot of time this approach turns people off or worse, shows the group to be selfish.

During the meeting, another Georgetown resident contended members of RAIDD have been able to enjoy the urban-rural setting Halton Hills offers because of development. But now that

they live in Halton Hills they don't want any more development for fear it will disrupt their rural-urban lifestyle.

In response, RAIDD chairman Gail Rutherford acknowledged she's heard this argument before but stressed RAIDD doesn't oppose all development. Instead, the group wants responsible development.

But the question remains, what is responsible development?

Taken alone the phrase is ambiguous. Developers wanting to build two 15-storey buildings in a single family home residential area, like Maple Avenue, wouldn't argue they are irresponsible. They could most probably supply proof the buildings would



**Ben's Banter**  
By Ben Dummett

be occupied and then in turn argue they are helping to address the shortage of housing. In this scenario, the market is the final arbitrator.

Opponents of this kind of development proposal would

argue it is irresponsible, because the developer is showing no consideration for the neighborhood character.

They argue the apartments would be best suited somewhere else. But where? The developers didn't pick the original neighborhood without reason. They know as well as anyone else this neighborhood is where people would probably prefer to live.

To RAIDD's credit the group invited those attending the meeting and anyone else, developers included, to help them design a long term residential, and commercial industrial development plant that could be submitted to the town for consideration.

But there is no time to waste. That doesn't mean drawing up a plan tomorrow. It means contributing as much as possible to the town's current urban study review.

The town is holding an information session Nov. 29 in conjunction with the review to get public input on the direction the town should take on the issue of development.

If members of RAIDD and the rest of the public are serious about influencing the town, attendance at this meeting and those to follow is imperative.

If people choose not to attend the meeting and they don't like the final outcome, they have no one to blame but themselves.

# Second half of fiscal year looks gloomy

By VIC PARSONS  
Ottawa Bureau

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OTTAWA - Now that half of Ottawa's fiscal year is over, let's take a peek at the Finance Department's books.

Just looking at the bottom line, the situation looks pretty good. In the April-to-September period, federal spending exceeded revenues by a mere \$10.6 billion.

That's a lot of potatoes, to be sure, but it's \$3 billion less than the deficit in the first six months of the last fiscal year.

You may not appreciate the reason for this improvement. So far this year, the government has taken \$30.7 billion in income taxes out of the pockets of individual taxpayers. That's a 24-per-cent increase over a year ago.

The Finance Department's Fiscal Monitor, a monthly publication, says it could do this because there was strong growth in personal incomes in the first half of 1990-91. A second factor is that tax refunds were lower than

a year ago due to the impact of tax reform.

Moreover, the taxman collected \$16.3 billion in unemployment insurance premiums, a 25-per-cent jump from last year.

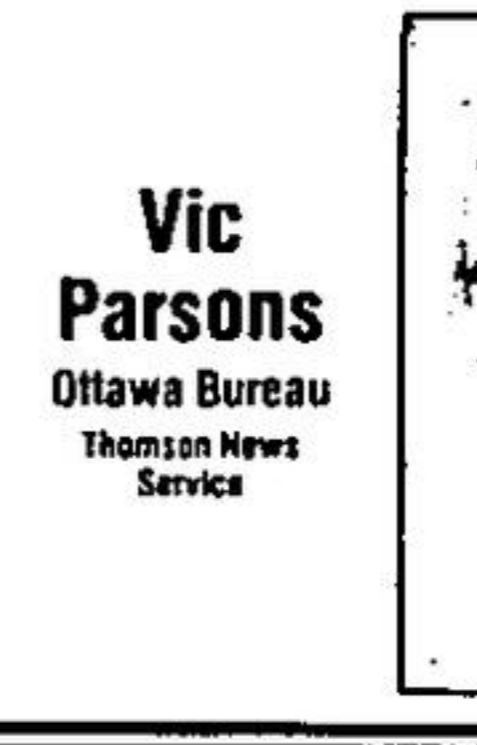
So far, so good, for those who like to see a shrinking of the federal deficit.

### DISAPPOINTMENT DUE

Unfortunately, those who read too much into these six-month numbers will be disappointed. They are like the optimist who fell from the top of a 20-storey building. "So far, so good," he said, after he'd fallen 10 floors.

As the department itself points out, things will get tougher toward the end of the fiscal year.

A key factor here is the miscalculation of interest rates by finance officials in last February's federal budget. The government has had to pay 12.1 per cent more in interest on the national debt than a year ago. Last February, Finance Minister Michael Wilson predicted interest payments - the largest single federal expenditure -



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would tally only 4.4 per cent more this year over last.

"The increase in public-debt charges reflects the compounding effect of the higher-than-expected increases in interest rates since the February, 1990 budget and the increase in the stock of debt," the Fiscal Monitor notes glumly.

Finance has now abandoned its earlier guess of a \$28.5-billion deficit for the fiscal year and is looking at a \$30-billion shortfall by the end of next March.

Even that might be unrealistic.

Wilson has consistently rejected suggestions from many respected economists that this recession will be deeper and longer than previously anticipated.

### JOBLESS RISING

Already unemployment rates have risen suddenly and sharply, exceeding the rate of increase in the devastating recession of 1981-82. The recently released October jobless rate was 8.8 per cent, a stunning rise from the 7.2-per-cent figure reported last April.

This worsening situation is showing up in the Finance Department's figures. Unemployment insurance benefits paid in the first half of the year totalled \$6.2 billion, up 14 per cent from a year ago.

Canada Assistance Plan payments by Ottawa to the provinces and territories rose by 18 per cent to \$2.9 billion. These larger welfare payouts were largely due to "increased caseloads due to the current

economic environment," the Fiscal Monitor says.

The introduction of the goods and services tax (GST) will also have adverse effects on Ottawa's bank balance this fiscal year. Assuming the controversial tax becomes law, the first GST credit to lower - and middle-income families will be paid in December. And rebates arising from replacement by the GST of the old federal sales tax will be going out to manufacturers.

These together will put another \$1.8-billion hole in the federal coffers before significant GST revenues are collected.

Finally, with the recession, corporate profits will continue the fall that began in the first half of this year. Lower profits means lower tax collections and though new federal corporate taxes have offset the decline to date, there's no reason to be optimistic here either.

The second half of fiscal 1990-91 does not present a pretty picture.

# Citizen's forum - a last minute undertaking

By STEWART McLEOD  
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OTTAWA - We don't have irrefutable proof that Prime Minister Brian Mulroney announced his Citizens' Forum on Canada's Future before he was ready - but, by golly, all indicators point in that direction.

It would be a pity if the forum, under chairman Keith Spicer, loses some of its credibility because of this, but the dangers are clearly there. Almost every day, in the immediate aftermath of the prime minister's announcement, there have been new hints of government unpreparedness.

There is every reason to believe Mr. Mulroney announced the forum to jump ahead of a similar initiative by a group of private citizens. This group, comprised largely of Liberals, had planned an announcement for the week of Nov. 4.

According to some reports, the prime minister even copied the name of the proposed group, which would have had only five or six members and, like the Spicer commission, would have travelled the country listening to Canadians talk about the future.

Officials close to Mr. Mulroney deny the connection. They say the Spicer forum was a prime ministerial initiative, without outside prodding, and had been planned for weeks.

Well, perhaps so, but it's passing strange that everything was left to the last possible moment on such an important undertaking.

### Not ready

There were even apparent confusions about the make-up of the commission when Mr. Mulroney announced it in the Commons. At first, we were led to believe it would be a full-fledged panel, with the 12 members devoting all

their energies to the task.

Gradually, through a series of explanations, it seems to have become a one-person commission, with 11 part-time members who will take part in hearings and advise Mr. Spicer.

"Some of these are extremely busy people," said the chairman, a few days after assuming command. "Look at their jobs. Not one is coming full time. A couple have told me the most they can give is maybe half-an-hour, an hour, a week."

While Mr. Spicer continues receiving his salary as chairman of the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission - in the ballpark of \$135,000 a year - the part-timers will get up to \$600 a day to help him out.

Whether this per diem will be broken down to hourly rates remains to be seen.

Mr. Spicer, we are given to understand, was asked to take on the assignment just three days before the announcement. Other members were added after that and some, such as Saint John Mayor Elsie Wayne, were asked less than two hours before the prime minister stood up in the Commons.

Invariably, with the formation of such commissions, the announcement is accompanied by biographical sketches of members. Not on this occasion. There wasn't time.

And, for the first day or two, no one seemed to have any details of how the group would operate, whether it would have a large support staff, where it would go and what exactly it would do.

At last report, no one knew the group's budget.

Mr. Spicer now says he expects the staff to grow to 50 or 75 by Christmas. Included will be 10 operators on a cross-country



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telephone hot-line.

### More change

The initial impression that the group would spend the bulk of its time travelling across Canada to talk and listen seems to be changing as well. Mr. Spicer will be doing much of this himself, with his start in Tuktoyaktuk, N.W.T.

Says the chairman: "I don't think we're getting a big groundswell of people wanting another road show, circus-type thing... we would like to reach the people who are normally too shy and reluctant to come forward."

What will come out of the deliberations is anyone's guess. Mr. Spicer said he didn't know, except that the prime minister "promised to take this very seriously."

One is left with the impression the two men didn't spend a great deal of time discussing things

deal with Quebec's Belanger-Campeau commission, whose recommendations come down in March.

before the announcement was cobbled together. Panel members spend even less time.

However, the announcement did come in time to head off the private initiative by the Trudeau-

era Liberals. Also, by giving the Spicer commission a July, 1991 deadline, Mr. Mulroney has bought himself three months to

The prime minister can't very

well do much about these proposals until he hears from his own study group.

Perhaps not planned, but nonetheless convenient.

## Berry's World

*Jim Berry*  
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**"Of course, if war DID break out, interest rates would ultimately go MUCH LOWER."**