

Opinion

Willow Park residents deserve a reprieve

Halton Hills community has a chance to start off 1991 on a charitable note.

The residents of Norval's Willow Park will literally be out on the streets this spring unless they can find a new site to locate their mobile homes.

The Ontario Municipal Board has ruled the residents can't relocate to the Nor-Halton Traller Park just south of Acton. They must vacate Willow Park by the end of May because the land has been expropriated by the Credit Valley Conservation Authority. The CVCA expropriated the land because it's in the Credit River Floodplain.

Unless a property owner applies to the Town to have their land open to mobile home use, the people will be forced to find other

types of housing or leave Halton Hills to maintain the same way of life.

According to Town mayor Russ Miller, the Nor-Halton Traller Park was the resident's last chance. An exhaustive search of the town turned up no alternatives, said the Mayor in a recent interview. Mayor Miller explained in a lot of cases applications weren't made because the landowners or their neighbors didn't like trailer parks.

No one can say for sure why people don't like trailer parks - park residents prefer the term mobile home park - but at least one resident, Roger Perryman, guesses the reason is based more on misperception than reality.

The general public stigmatizes mobile homeowners, says Mr.



Ben's Banter

By Ben Dummett

Perryman. In other words people consider this type of homeowner as a constant partier.

This perception simply isn't true. I've met with several mobile homeowners while work-

ing with the Herald and I've learned they are no different than other people except they choose to live in mobile homes. They have jobs, children, and yes, like everybody else, the occasional party.

People might question, if Willow Park residents are no different, why don't they choose to live in more "normal" housing. The answer comes down to nothing more than personal preference and affordability. A lot of young families live in the park because mobile homes provide an affordable means of ownership - an aspiration shared by many new families.

Those who have property that may be suitable for the mobile homes but are caught up in the

stigma of mobile homeowners should take the time to visit the park and talk with the people. I'm sure they would come away pleasantly surprised. I encourage the neighbors of any interested property owner to do likewise.

Just as the Halton Hills community should rally to support the residents of Willow Park, so to should the Credit Valley Conservation Authority.

If the residents need more time than currently allotted to find a new location then an extension should be granted. I realize the authority is worried that the possibility of flooding in the park presents a real danger to the residents, but surely some sort of temporary precautions could be made giving the people the extra time they may need.

Canada providing entertainment for alien observers

OTTAWA - An observer from outer space could get a good deal on entertainment these days by training a high-powered telescope on Canada.

The frenzy of confused, dismayed and hostile consumers trying to figure out just what Ottawa's new sales tax means might be as hilarious to an alien as a Hollywood high-speed chase through an outdoor fruit and vegetable market.

Here, for example, we have a throng of auto dealers urging customers to take advantage of the great price reductions available after removal of the old federal sales tax and the imposition of the GST.

These, incidentally, are the same sellers who offered terrific pre-GST bargains to the same clients through an array of discounts, rebates and low-interest payments. This time, of course, they really mean it.

Over there are big department stores offering GST-free sales in January on clothing and shoes - two items not hit by the old sales

tax - as they try to offload items that weren't snapped up in the pre-Christmas and Boxing Day bonanzas.

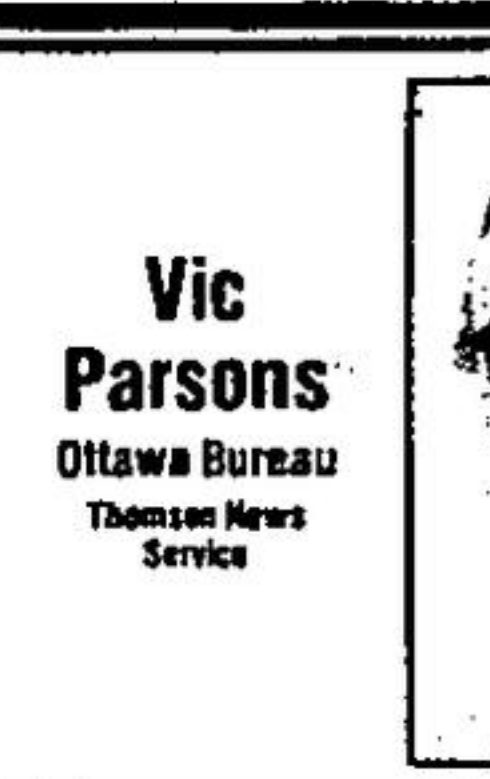
Then there's the outbreak of GST flu. One report said half the clerks in one Canada Post office called in sick because they couldn't bear facing grumbling customers who now have to pay the GST on postage.

Cash registers were indisposed as well. At least one Ottawa candy store didn't open Jan. 2 because it wasn't set up yet to deal with the GST.

COFFEE DILEMMA

Even the morning cup of coffee posed fiscal uncertainties. My preferred purveyor charge no GST on the cuppa and muffin, at least until cash registers are set up. A closer, but less favored, coffee shop charged the tax from Jan. 1.

How about those \$19-million consumer defenders, laughingly referred to as the GST police? The Consumer Information Office handled 10,000 calls on Day One of the GST, including com-



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plaints and queries from befuddled shoppers.

But the powerless protectors of purchasers have added to the confusion themselves. In its Consumer Guide, released last fall, the office fearlessly predicted a 1.7 per cent drop in gasoline prices per litre.

It turns out the office figured wrongly, and it later admitted prices would rise instead. By the reckoning in the guide, the neighborhood Petro-Canada should have dropped its regular unleaded gas to 65.6 cents a litre

on Jan. 1 from the 66.9 cents that applied on Dec. 31. Unfortunately, the price rose to 67.9 cents.

The tax turmoil has entered the realm of daily newspapers, too. An office colleague was charged \$1.41, tax included, for his three regular dailies on Wednesday. On Thursday, it was \$1.43.

Buy Ottawa's two daily papers and you are zapped with the GST on one and nothing on the second. One national business paper has doubled the price if you buy it from a street-corner box, but only increased home delivery rates by the GST rate.

Consider troubled Albertans, who, before Jan. 1, didn't know such a beast as retail sales tax existed. For the first time, they are confronted by a visible tax. It's cold comfort in chilly times that, as government politicians hasten to explain, they were paying a hidden levy before.

And what of Quebecers, who now see their "harmonized" provincial sales tax applied to a range of items - notably clothing and furniture - that weren't hit

before? Worse, the provincial bite is compounded on the new GST, giving the Quebec government a little windfall.

Perhaps all this flutter is inevitable with any new tax. In time, we'll grow accustomed to its ugly face and it will be an expected part of life, as it is in another 50 countries. Hopefully, anomalies will be corrected and bizarre discrepancies resolved.

Who knows? We might even become less vigilant about the truly frightening potential of the GST - that governments may see seven per cent as merely a starting point for milking of taxpayers.

Our national leaders have promised no increases in the life of this government. Indeed, Prime Minister Brian Mulroney even said in one year-end interview Ottawa might cut the rate immediately if it collects too much.

If tax history is the same on other planets as on Spaceship Earth, no doubt that line brought a smile to the green lips of our space observer.

Not an easy time to be in politics

As public cynicism toward governments - not to mention the people who run them - reaches record heights, it's little wonder that politicians point accusing fingers at the media.

Not that it does them much good. Complaining about the way the media behave has never been a winning endeavor. It's regarded as simple carping.

Yet, the complainers do have a valid point. There is little doubt that we in the media tend, on balance, to convey a negative view of politicians, particularly those in government. Just glance back at 1990.

There was the whole Meech Lake fiasco that resulted in most participants, particularly Prime Minister Brian Mulroney, being labelled as backroom manipulators. From a purely political viewpoint, it was a devastating exercise. And it hasn't ended yet. Even those accusations we've heard against the CBC - about its alleged bias in favor of the accord - managed to throw more cynicism in the direction of politicians.

The Meech business alone, or at least the coverage of it, probably played a large role in reducing the public's trust in our system of government. One year-end poll indicated that only 11 per cent of Canadians were satisfied with the system.

That same poll showed that 61 per cent of respondents think government is less effective than five years ago. And 63 per cent said they have a more unfavorable view of politicians than they did five or 10 years ago.

Even forgetting Meech for the moment, the results don't come as a shock. The publicity generated by politicians in the last year would add a healthy dose of cynicism to anyone's thought processes.

What about the Oka crisis? That was clearly a no-winner for either the federal or Quebec government - or anyone within those governments. Whether all the negative media coverage was justified is a separate question; the point is, it happened.

Then there was the goods and services tax, the ludicrous sideshow in the Senate, the confusion and contradictions over the purpose of the tax, and finally its messy implementation. Try to think of one politician who emerged from that with added Brownie points.

We can certainly discount the eight new senators who were appointed for the express purpose of ramming the GST through the red chamber.

On general economic matters, there was scarcely a day without critical comments in newspapers and on television. The government's interest-rate policy alone generated enough negative ink to float the Titanic. Finance Minister Michael Wilson could have saved himself, and the government, a month of embarrassment by merely admitting we were into a recession. More cynicism created.

Why, our politicians were even criticized for their Christmas messages. And there were several disapproving columns about the photographs on some



Stewart MacLeod

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MP's Christmas cards.

NEVER ENDS

There is no need to remind everyone what happened to Ontario premier David Peterson when he was perceived to be opportunistic in calling an unnecessary election. He took a journalistic hammering for what became a losing exercise.

In fact, it's not easy to think of any major government initiative that attracted acclaim. It certainly wasn't the long-awaited Green Paper on the environment.

Even cartoons about our politicians seem to be taking on a sharper, sometimes nastier, edge.

Whether present-day politicians deserve all the criticism is open to debate. But there is little doubt that the thrust of journalism has changed dramatically in the last decade. In Ottawa, for instance, membership in the Parliamentary Press Gallery has quadrupled, with a higher proportion of columnists and commentators who freely offer opinions. Even hard-news reporters

have become more opinionated in their writing.

It's easier to be negative, particularly with the benefit of hindsight.

Mr. Mulroney said not long ago that protesters on Parliament Hill get more favorable coverage than he does. And Liberal Leader Jean Chretien has been stunned by the criticism he has absorbed at the hands of the Quebec media.

"It is more than I expected," he said.

Overall, it's not likely to get better. With media outlets proliferating, particularly in all-news television, every political move is subjected to increasing scrutiny. There simply aren't enough important facts to go around.

And that's probably why we've seen two separate columns about the ugliness of the Governor General's dog.

No, regardless of performances, these are not easy times to be in politics.

