

## Opinion

## Region and Town budgets toe the line

Local residents should have no reason to complain about the 1991 Halton Regional and Town of Halton Hills budget increases since both only reflect the rate of inflation. More important, however, council at each level did what they promised.

One of the public's biggest complaints about politicians at all levels of government is their frequent failure to keep promises, especially when it comes to financial matters. Well, the opposite is true this time around.

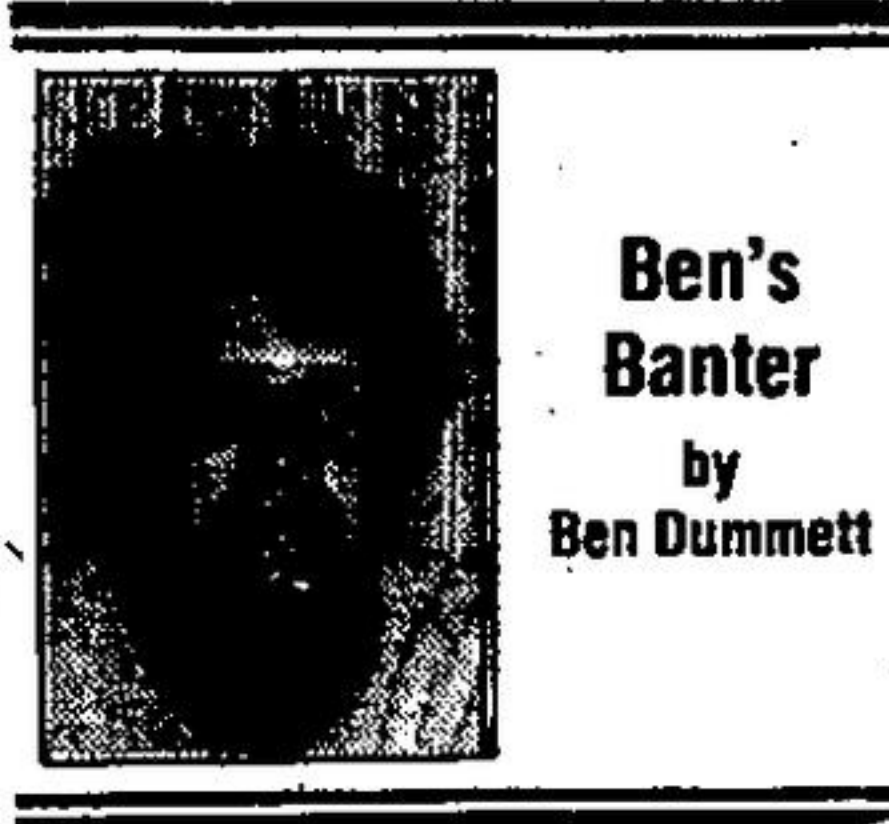
Both Regional and Town councils made declarations last Fall that anything less than a five to six per cent budget increase for this year would be unacceptable. They based their declarations on the many letters they received from the public expressing the opinion people can't afford yearly

tax increases of nine, 10 or 11 per cent.

Feeling the public's wrath, which just happens to have peaked during an election year - the municipal elections happen this November - Regional council approved an average 5.74 per cent increase while Town councillors approved a 5.2 per cent increase. Comparatively, the inflation rate is now running at slightly more than six per cent.

To arrive at the relatively low increase, each council was prevented from adding to existing services and in some cases was forced to make cutbacks.

Theoretically people have no problem with this philosophy. In fact they promote it. Government's, like a typical family, must only fund what they can afford. This is a common idea



Ben's  
Banter  
by  
Ben Dummett

shared by a lot of the public.

The only problem is, if a family cuts back its spending, only a few people are affected, but when government acts the same way,

large portions of a community are affected - a realization people only come to grips with when it hits them directly. At that time, a lot of people forget the credo that government should handle their finances like individuals do and they condemn the government.

But if people want governments to take their needs seriously - which is the case of the 1991 budget increase, Regional and Town levels have accomplished - people must also be willing to accept the repercussions. As part of the obligation, people must also realize the repercussions may not only exist in the short run but also in the long run.

For instance, Town council rejected a proposal to hire two paid firefighters to help keep the 1991 increase to a minimum. Halton Hills Fire Chief Bill Cunningham

said the salaried firefighters will be needed in the future but aren't essential now.

Logically, council cut the expense from the 1991 budget. However, as time passes and the need for paid firefighters becomes essential, council could find itself forced to hire several in one year. An expense like this could force a budget increase down the road much higher than if council had phased in the expense.

People must realize the Town is limited to how much it can run its finances like that of the typical family. When it comes to the issue of fire safety and the like, factors other than money should take a higher priority.

But for now, the public should applaud both councils for keeping their respective budget promises.

## Experts did not predict the GST jolt

By VIC PARSONS  
Ottawa Bureau

Thomson News Service

OTTAWA - When even the experts are stunned, how are the rest of us supposed to feel?

The unprecedented surge in consumer prices in January caught nearly everyone off guard. By a large margin, the 2.6-per-cent rise in January from December was the biggest month-to-month increase ever reported by Statistics Canada.

About three-fifths of that increase was accounted for by taxes, primarily the shiny new goods and services tax that, on Jan. 1, dropped on consumers like a ton of bricks. Much of the rest was accounted for by higher fresh fruit and vegetable prices because of bad weather in the southern United States.

Economists knew the GST hit was coming, and anticipated a sudden climb in the consumer price index, but no one seems to have predicted such a severe jolt.

When StatsCan surveyed a group of 23 economists in January for their estimates of

price index changes, the guesses ranged from 4.8 to 6.4 per cent between January, 1990, and January, 1991. The average was 5.6 per cent.

But the actual numbers show prices have jumped by 6.8 per cent over the 12 months, the largest year-over-year rise since March, 1983.

Why is this a surprise? The GST, after all, is a seven-per-cent tax. True, but economists expected that prices of many goods, notably manufactured products, would fall because of the replacement of the old 13.5-per-cent federal sales tax by the GST.

## LOWERED PRICES

They also believed that the recession and consumer resistance to buying would force retail businesses to eat some of the new tax by lowering prices. Apparently, this did not happen as much as was anticipated.

Some pundits felt that even the prediction by Finance Minister Michael Wilson of a 1.25-per-cent rise in prices due to the GST was overly pessimistic.

StatsCan, however, found the

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rise attributable to the GST was 1.4 per cent, exceeding Wilson's estimate. Another 0.2 per cent (bringing the total tax-induced price hike to 1.8 per cent) resulted from Quebec's harmonization of its provincial sales tax with the GST and increases in gas taxes, drivers' licences and vehicle registration fees.

Art Ridgeway, chief of StatsCan's consumer price section, says the gap between Wilson's prediction and the federal agency's actual figures is not as large as it might seem.

Wilson's figure was based on information that was a year-and-a-half old, he says, while StatsCan had the advantage of more recent data. Given that, the results are "relatively close."

On the other hand, not all price hikes arising from the GST have gone through yet. The federal agency noted, for instance, that new house prices were not included in the January index and will be reported in February's figures.

## ANOTHER HIT

Moreover, Saskatchewan, which recently became the second province to agree to "harmonize" with the GST, will apply its provincial tax to all federally taxed goods in April, and services next January. This harmony means prices will be hit later this year in Saskatchewan and whichever other provinces follow suit.

Perhaps a general indicator of how prices have risen more than expected can be found in comparing StatsCan's consumer prices against the list put out last fall by the GST consumer information

office (CIO).

Caution is required, because the CIO reports just those changes anticipated from the GST, while StatsCan's figures are affected by all causes, including annual sticker price changes. But it may be significant that in nearly every case, prices have risen more than the CIO predicted.

Exceptions are clothing and travel accommodation, previously untaxed at the federal level. Both the CIO and StatsCan report a 6.1-per-cent increase for clothing, while hotel rooms actually rose by 4.6 per cent when the CIO prediction was 5.2.

But, look at these numbers, with the actual StatsCan increases first and the CIO prediction in brackets: Restaurant food, 7.2 per cent (5.2); furniture, 2.7 (decline of 1.8); electricity, 10.6 (6.8); reading materials, 9.2 (5.5); taxis, 8.1 (4.8); drinks served in bars, 7.0 (2.3); appliances, 0.8 (decline of one per cent).

All the evidence suggests the GST's inflationary impact has been greatly underestimated.

## GORI — Abortion not just a women's issue

Dear Editor:

Thank you, again, for publishing the (rather long) letters from Joan Davison and myself on women's issues. One point has already been clarified: while we seem to basically agree on women's issues, as presented, we disagree on the question of abortion. Abortion is not only a women's issue: I believe that the male fathers are just as responsible for procreation (whether the baby is carried to term or aborted) and mostly responsible for the easy-sex attitude which causes unwanted pregnancies. They are often the very ones who propose abortion to their partners as an easy way out. Often they do so to avoid their own

responsibilities. Abortion on demand is also an issue that touches all of society: However silent the media is on the subject, the number of human beings (male and female) who died by abortion in the 1st year in Canada alone, is greater (as far as we know today) than all the people killed in the Gulf war. What a disaster for our nation to be in a continuous war! A "green" bloody war fought with weapons that kill people with no apparent damage to the environment, but with a profound effect on families and society.

Joan mentions women trapped into becoming baby factories, rape, ignorance, coercion and unwanted pregnancies. Why are

all these problems appearing in the hundreds of thousands after about twenty years of sex education, women's liberation, proliferation and availability of condoms, government subsidized programs, sexual explicitness in the media and accessibility to abortion? I can see only two answers, either: 1) - all these "solutions" are in part causing an increase of the problems (and thus of unwanted pregnancies), or 2) - increased abortions are due to a conscious decision to change the law of the land. In the second case, the above problems appear to be used (individually and collectively) as a justification for our changed attitude.

If these problems indeed do exist in large numbers, why not to attack the root of the problem with financial help, moral help and laws to aid and protect women from being trapped in such situations? Why not to increase, at the same time, programs and services (such as crisis pregnancy centers) to allow pregnant women to remove themselves from desperate abusive situations and hate relationships?

It is interesting that Joan (I assume by mistake) calls "fetus" a person who grew up resulting from an unwanted pregnancy. She asks whether it is better, to abort it or to let "it" grow up in poverty, abuse, hatred and despair? I suggest that she conduct a simple poll: find some of

the poor, desperate, abused and hated and ask them! Perhaps they will tell her that they wish the abuse and the hate would stop, but they consider their right to life a matter of fact. I know she would not propose the same "solution" (i.e. extermination) to the problems of famine or poverty in Mexico or Ethiopia. Yes, the FCP intends to be very active in stamping out all the other problems, but the cry of the unborn torn apart alive in the mother's womb is, in our opinion, louder than the cry of the poor.

Joan concludes her letter with some original criticism of the Judeo-Christian religions. The FCP is based on Judeo-Christian principles (remember, even the

NDP was once based on the same principles?). Although various Christian religions differ in doctrine, liturgy and other serious matters, the fundamental principles are common, well known and generally understood. Many, of course, do not espouse any such system of rules of moral conduct, but tend to create the rules to fit their own behaviour. I would refer her to a pastor or someone who may better than me dialogue on the subject and show her the merits of Christianity with respect to other religions, sects or, say, the New Age movement.

Sincerely,  
Giuseppe Gori,  
Acton, Ont.

## Hats off to youth

Dear Sir:

In a recent Youth Forum in the Herald, you asked what would you do if you ruled the world?

Congratulations Park School - Marcy Hallett, Jeff Boyce and Michelle Wiener - we need you, and give thanks for your wise words on answering this forum.

Marcy Hallett, grade 5 - "I would make peace on earth. I would get rid of the war makers, the tanks and nuclear bombs."

Jeff Boyce, grade 1 - "I would protect the animals."

Michelle Wiener, grade 3 - "I would clean up the world and stop pollution. I'd make everyone compost and recycle."

Is anyone listening to the children? These words should be required reading for all politicians.

The awakening of interest is the most crucial and most elusive aspect of education. If the education industry does not create people who are interested in the world about them during one single life, then education has failed.

Obviously, not at Park School. Yea Park School and the parents of those feisty class young Canadians.

Sincerely,  
Dr. Esme A. Ball,  
Georgetown

## Dogs must be controlled

Dear Sir:

I'm writing in response to the article about Mr. George Binder's dog that was shot. It's sad, but why should we feel for him? What right does he have to allow his dogs off his property to roam where they please? What if everyone did it? He has property for them to run in, why do they have to go where they might frighten someone who doesn't know they are friendly? Does he own the conservation area too?

I used to live in the country. I had a big dog, and I trained him not to go off the property and he never did. I had neighbors who

felt their dog had a right to run and it would come and do it's doods on my garden.

People seem to think they can do as they please. The owners should be charged. Halton Township needs more dog catchers. I live in Town now and I go to walk my small dog and nearly every time I do I've got some big dog to face. Makes me sick. Maybe we wouldn't have this problem if owners take care of their pets and be responsible for a change. Otherwise, don't have any. Look after it or lose it.

Andrea DiMonte,  
Georgetown.