

Political Forum Ottawa Report

Great challenges are ahead for Canada

One day last week I was sitting in a committee meeting in Ottawa, listening to several MPs complain bitterly about the cost of the Spicer Commission on national unity.

The Liberals and the separatist Bloc Quebecois members said Spicer was spending too much money, for an ill-defined reason. I found myself arguing the other side, saying that Canada is worth whatever it takes. My chief supporter in that argument was NDPer John Rodriguez.

Politics, the saying goes, makes for strange bedfellows. Politics is all around us - in families, offices, schools and the House of Commons. Politics, my experience has shown me over the last couple of years, is little more than managing human relationships while you pursue what you believe in.

Because Rodriguez and I believe Canada is more important than a political party, we came together during that meeting. Because he believes corporate taxes are too low and I believe in reducing the deficit, we'll clash again soon.

These thoughts are with me because while that meeting was going on there was a brief ceremony on the first floor of the building where my Ottawa office is located. I wanted to be there, but the Spicer enquiry prevented it.

The ceremony was to dedicate a small room to the memory of Sean O'Sullivan, who was the MP



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for Hamilton-Wentworth, the youngest man to sit in the House of Commons and the promising politician who quit to be a priest. O'Sullivan died two years ago, of cancer. I went to his funeral in Toronto - a big, political event, jammed with public leaders and hundreds of others who spilled out of the cathedral and onto the lawns outside.

The meditation room was opened with words from two of O'Sullivan's friends, former prime minister John Turner and finance minister Michael Wilson. I have seen these two men glare in sheer anger at each other across the aisle in Parliament. But the cause of Sean O'Sullivan brought them together, and had them say the same things.

I never met the MP who turned priest, which I today regret. I think he could have taught me about the relative importance of politics in life; about why he left

to study religion; and why in his later years he felt badly about the aggressive way he had pursued his political career.

O'Sullivan had been a tiger - using people to get ahead, questioning leadership, criticizing behind others' backs, spreading rumors and raising doubts. Those tools made him a successful politician, just as they would for anyone else today. Politics is as much about tearing others down as it is about building yourself up.

But, as he described in his book, "Both My Houses," Sean O'Sullivan came to see that was wrong. He changed his ways. He quit politics to renew himself - retreating from the spotlight, going off first to study and then to help common people in anonymity east of Toronto.

One of his last, public gestures was to orchestrate an advertising campaign for the church. His billboard showed Christ on the cross, against the skyline of Toronto, with the words, "dare to be a priest like me." It was highly controversial.

The Sean O'Sullivan meditation room has a few chairs and tables in it, along with a big, wooden altar. Carved into the altar by a House of Commons employee is a beaver, because it was O'Sullivan who brought in a private member's bill recognizing the beaver as a symbol of Canada. Not a big deal in the scheme of things, but something worth doing. We need all the symbols we can get these days.

And that brings me back to Spicer, and the future of our country.

There are going to be great challenges ahead. Lots of arguments and passion. The separatists will tell Quebec there is no risk in leaving, and much to gain. The reactionaries here will say, "let them go," claiming

we'll all be better off and taking advantage of the feelings of hurt and rejection we all experience.

Politics, in its worst form, is doing this. Politics, in its best form, can solve it.

When I doubt that, there is a room I can visit to restore some faith in the system, and the future.

CHECK OUT

OUR SPECIALS

IN OUR FLYER

THIS WEEKEND IN THE HERALD

SOCCER

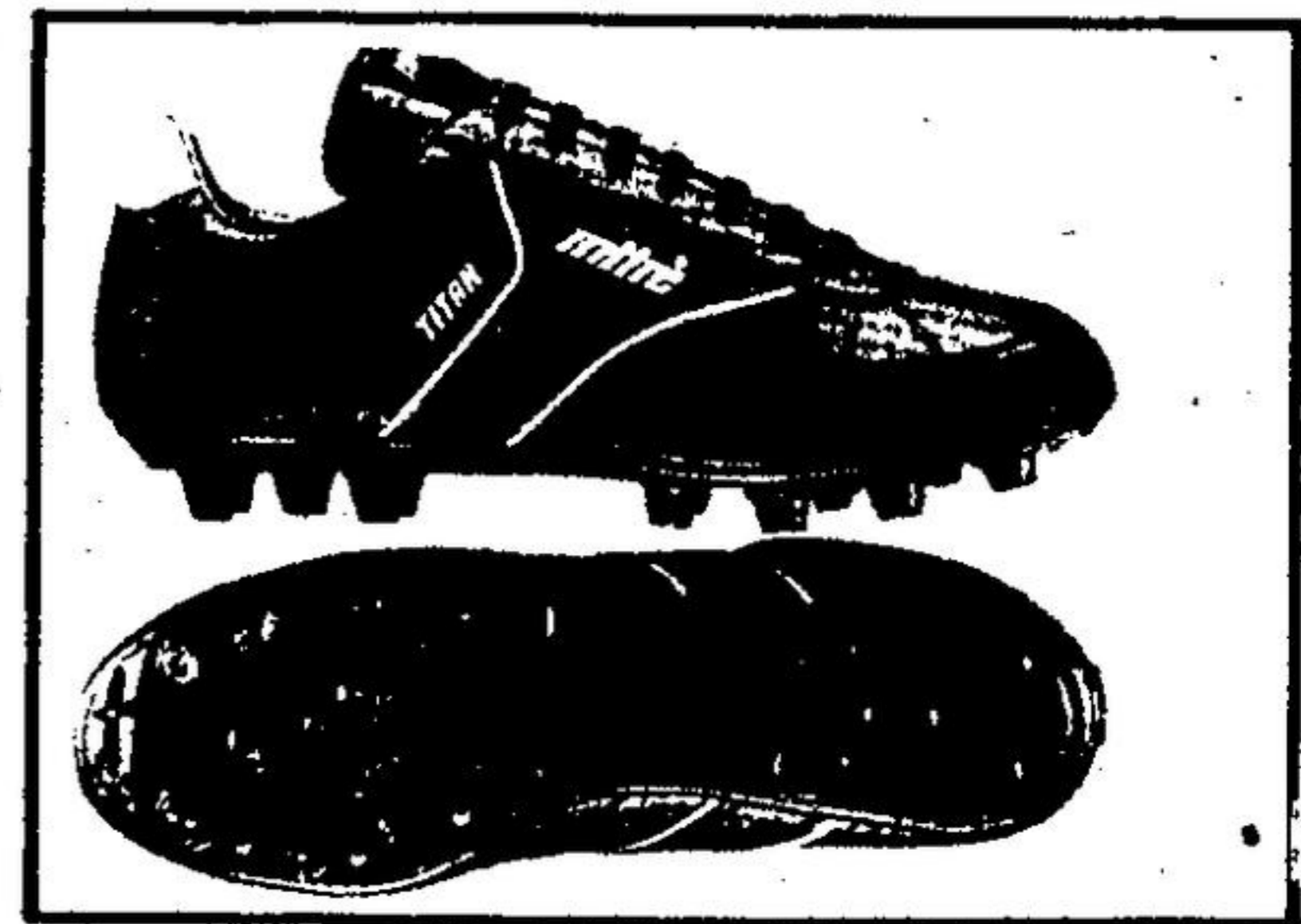
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Queen's Park Report

NDP initiatives discussed

On previous occasions I discussed various government initiatives and I would like to begin my report this week by informing you of the status of some of them.

In January, I wrote about the program introduced by Attorney General Howard Hampton to reduce the backlog in the courts and to speed up trial scheduling. On March 26th, Mr. Hampton announced that significant progress had been made toward a more efficient process. Preliminary figures indicate that approximately 96 per cent of all new charges entering the system are being scheduled within six months.

In November the Attorney General had announced the government's commitment toward the appointment of 27 new Provincial Division judges and additional Crown counsel in order to comply with the Supreme Court of Canada decision relating to delays in the criminal court system. At the time of the Askov ruling last October, about three-quarters of the charges were scheduled to appear beyond eight months. Through the efforts of the entire court system, now only approximately 35 per cent are scheduled beyond that time frame.

Eighteen of the 27 judges have been appointed and six Crown counsel, 29 Assistant Crown Attorneys and 139 administrative staff have been hired. The Crown counsel and Assistant Crown Attorneys now under contract will be available on a rotating basis to assist in areas where they are most needed. Two of these individuals are currently located in Halton. Twenty-nine members of the administrative staff are located in the Central West Region which includes Halton and Peel.

In February, I mentioned that the Select Committee on Ontario in Confederation, chaired by MPP Tony Silipo, would be travelling throughout the province to ask Ontarians about their views on the challenges facing our society and what those mean for the structure of governments and for our nation. This 12-



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member all-party Committee was established by the Ontario Legislature on December 20th. On March 21st the Committee presented its Interim Report to the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly. Copies of the Report are available at my constituency offices in Milton and Georgetown.

Also in February, I outlined our position on auto insurance. Many of you have expressed your concerns about the threshold no-fault automobile insurance plan which was introduced by the previous government in late 1989 and which took effect in June 1990.

That Act removed substantive legal rights from the citizens while at the same time allowing for substantial profits by the insurance companies. Financial Institutions Minister Brian Charlton has been reviewing the various options and any legislation introduced by our government will reflect your concerns and comments.

Recent measures announced in the Legislature include the introduction and first reading of The Arbitration Act, 1991 on March 27th. Attorney General Howard Hampton indicated that the bill has been designed as part of an overall commitment to improve access to justice in Ontario. Arbitration can be more expedient and less costly than going to court and the new statute will make it easier for people to submit private disputes to resolution through this method. Arbitration may arise in many instances, but is common in construction contracts and in renewal clauses in commercial leases. Please call my Milton office at 878-1729 if you would like a copy of Mr. Hampton's statement.

Government sale

Complete equipment for a shoe repair shop, home appliances, including stoves, refrigerators, washers, dryers and televisions will be on sale at the Ontario government's next cash and carry sale, Saturday, April 6, from 9 a.m. until 12 noon.

Other items, including a large selection of desks, chairs, typewriters, filing cabinets, computers, dictaphones, adding machines and other office equipment will also be available at discount prices.

All goods are on a first come, first served basis. Location of the sale is 99 Adesso Drive, Concord, one stoplight east of the junction of Highway 400 and Steeles Avenue.

Cash, Visa, MasterCard or certified cheque made payable to the Treasurer of Ontario are accepted. Ontario public servants are not eligible to purchase items at the surplus assets sales.

Say: "I saw it in The Herald"