

Political Forum

Ottawa Report

We all have a role to play in lowering taxes

A couple of weeks ago there was a taxpayers' protest meeting - more like a rally, I guess - in the community centre at Caledon East.

There were more than 400 people there, and they had not come to praise governments at any level. In fact, the master of ceremonies opened the meeting by saying "the people are at war with the politicians." Then he said something about politicians having "stolen" the country from the citizens.

It was hostile language, and it sure didn't make me feel any more comfortable, as I hung around the doorway feeling several hundred sets of eyes drill into my back. It was one of those times when the word "politician" gets hung around your neck. It might as well read "axe murderer."

Anyway, I was invited to speak, and I did. And nobody booed or heckled - which is what I thought might happen after that kind of introduction. It was not an easy evening to be part of, because of the intense negative energy in the room. But it was important to be there - for a number of reasons.

First, it is wonderful that 400 people would come out, unglue themselves from their televisions

and become part of the political process. If it took anger and frustration to do that, well, so what? The important thing was to take the step to get involved.

Second, they showed support for the fledgling Taxpayers Coalition Caledon, which is a grassroots organization of property owners, and part of the larger province-wide Coalition. They are assuming an important watchdog role on local taxation, and increasingly looking at provincial finances as well.

Third, this kind of lobby group will help bring about what we really need - fundamental reform of the way we're taxed and governed.

I spoke a bit about that at the Caledon East meeting, and touched on these five points that I believe are essential in the battle for less government and lower taxes:

- Governments are falling over each other. They need to be disentangled - to stop duplicating services, which leads to waste and inefficiency. Road maintenance for example - it's carried out by local, regional and provincial crews, on roads we've designated as (you guessed it) as local, regional or provincial. Simply dumb. Just like having 11 en-

Garth Turner
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vironment ministers in the country.

- The government that spends should be the one that taxes. Right now the feds collect money, give it to the provinces and have no control over how it's spent. Provincial governments tell local school boards what programs to enact, then local property taxes have to rise to pay for them. If the government that set up the programs had to tax to fund them,

then we, as taxpayers, would have more direct say in things, through our votes.

- Taxes should be dedicated - that means taxing us for specific purposes. Like the GST is now dedicated 100% to paying down the deficit. We should dedicate other taxes, for health care, social welfare payments, the environment and so on. Then we'd know better where our tax bucks go.

- There ought to be more coordination between governments at different levels when they come to tax. We have four governments and one set of taxpayer pockets. So I've been calling for a tax conference of all these governments to start talking our way to common sense.

- Finally, all governments should legislate limits on spending. The feds have done this now - capping spending at 3% increases a year. If spending ex-

ceeds that, then other programs have to be cut. That's the law. Maybe it's time the provinces passed similar laws - because we need some guarantee against increases like the one (14%) we just got from Queen's Park.

These key points, to me, make sense. I've been trying to sell them in Ottawa - first to Michael Wilson, now to his successor, Finance Minister Don Mazankowski.

But convincing the cabinet ministers and bureaucrats in Ottawa is just one piece of the puzzle - the province and local governments have to want to reform as well. And that's where groups like the Taxpayers Coalition have a big role to play.

It isn't war. It's change. The words "us" and "them" have to be turned back into "we." Until that happens, none of us will see what we want for our great country, and for ourselves.

Queen's Park Report

Budget discussion

First Budget

Last week I talked to you about our government's first budget and I would like to continue that discussion with some comments on the Conservative obstruction of legislation at Queen's Park.

Since late April the Conservative members of the Legislature have been using various tactics to delay and obstruct the business of the House. They say they are opposed to the budget and on May 6th Mike Harris told the House: "People know where I stand on the budget; I am not going to let it pass." But rather than have a debate in the House and in Committee, the Tories have wasted two weeks of the Legislature's time and the taxpayer's money.

What the constituents of Halton North should know is that the Tories' grandstanding is keeping the House from dealing with important legislation that will benefit and protect you.

For example, Bill 17 provides for the automatic collection of support payments by way of deductions from wages. It is estimated that \$334 million is currently outstanding - money that delinquent spouses owe to their former spouses and to their children. Passing the bill - which was scheduled for the week of May 6th - would move a big step closer to fairness for these women and children. Don't the Tories care?

The Employee Wage Protection Program (Bill 70) provides protection for workers who are laid off and are owed wages, vacation pay, holiday pay, termination pay or severance pay. We want to pass Bill 70 so that workers "do not become victims of circumstances they cannot control," as Labour Minister Bob Mackenzie has said. Don't the Tories care about protecting people who have lost their jobs? As many as 50,000 workers - including many of you in Halton North - may be eligible for compensation in the first 18 months of the program; the payout may be as much as \$175 million. We are ready to proceed with Bill 70 as soon as the Opposition decides that your protection matters to them.

The people of Halton North need to know what is going on. The Conservatives are fighting for their political lives - I believe against the Reform Party - by



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pretending the Mulroney Tories aren't members of the same political party as Mike Harris, Chris Stockwell, Diane Cunningham, Cam Jackson and the other Conservatives at Queen's Park. So instead of being able to proceed with the business of the House, we're getting obstruction and delay from the same political party whose federal members - such as Garth Turner - brought us the disastrous economic policies that have made this the worst recession in Ontario and in Canada in 50 years.

Liberal gathering

Five possible Ontario Liberal Party leadership candidates will be speaking at tonight's (Wednesday) North-Halton Liberal Association fundraising dinner in Milton, says former North Halton MPP Walt Elliot.

The five include high profile Liberal MPPs Greg Sobara, Dave Ramsay, Charles Beer, Lyn McLeod and Steve Mohoney. All but Mr. Mohoney were cabinet ministers during the David Peterson Liberal government.

It is these five who accepted an invitation that was extended to the entire Liberal caucus by the local association to address the audience on the leadership issue, said Mr. Elliot.

Liberal MPPs won't be permitted to officially declare their candidacy in the leadership race until after the party's annual convention to be held at the end of this month in Toronto.

The North-Halton Liberal Riding Association dinner starts at 6:30 p.m. tonight (Wednesday) at the Mohawk Raceway.

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