

OTTAWA REPORT

Ottawa Throne Speech fills important gaps

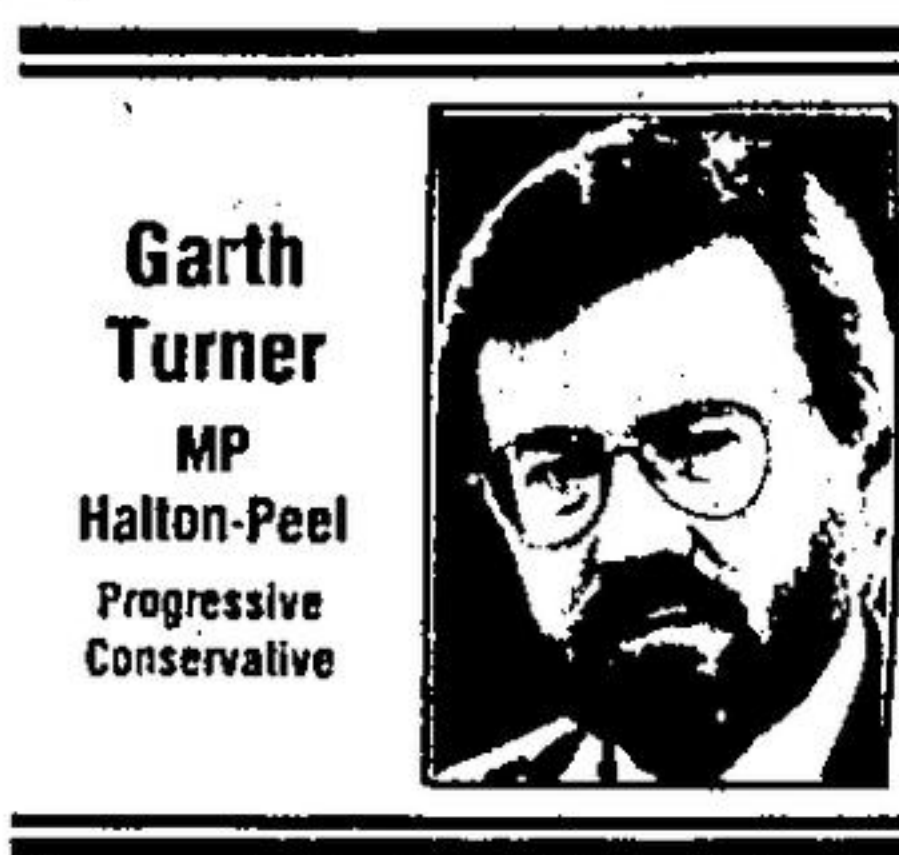
The cannons boomed on Parliament Hill. The Governor-General clopped up to the Parliament Buildings in a horse-drawn carriage.

And, inside, MPs trooped from the House of Commons back to the brass bar at the entrance of the Senate in a tradition that goes back to the origins of the British system of government.

It was the Speech from the Throne - the government's agenda for the next few months, and there was a lot more going on

here than a ton of pomp and circumstance. Because we face so many major challenges right now as a country, I wanted to make sure the three main themes of that speech were presented to you for some comment:

- First (of course) is national unity. The country threatens to break apart from within, and the forces of regionalism and separation have been unleashed on Canada. Ottawa has been buffeted about by this at the eye of



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the storm. But Ottawa alone can't solve the problem.

So, this is the plan - first the Spicer commission reports its findings on what average people think ought to happen. Then the committee studying how the Constitution should be amended reports. Then, in September, the government makes everybody an offer - unveiling proposals to Quebec, the rest of the country and aboriginal people.

- Finally, and most important of all, is new legislation coming to make Members of Parliament more independent.

As regular readers will know, this is something I have been asking for since the day I got elected. More free votes in the House of Commons. More ability to speak out on issues regardless of what the government's position is. And, as a result, the ability to better represent the people who vote for me.

After that, five months of study by a Parliamentary committee, travelling to all provincial capitals. Finally, then, a resolution - a referendum, maybe?

Then, likely the next month, another major proposal - this time on how to make Canada more competitive. Given what the truckers have been telling us over the last few days, do we have any choice but to devote all kinds of energy to getting competitive?

Of course not. And so Ottawa is going to be setting educational standards, pumping more money into research and development and concentrating on how we can trade our way to prosperity. Okay - I know. It's just a lot of fancy buzzwords right now, but after spending some time the other night with Bill Winegard, Minister of Science, I'm feeling a lot more confident that the government knows the problem and is forming solutions.

I don't have to tell you how people are feeling about politicians in general. The cynicism and mistrust have come from many sources - some of it is certainly valid, and all of it has to be addressed. This may be an important step in restoring dignity and respect for our public institutions. Free Members of Parliament will give Parliament what it needs and I am anxious to see that day arrive.

The Throne Speech will not change the world, but it fills in some of the gaps while recognizing the problems we all know exist. It's make-or-break time for national unity; for economic recovery; and for the way we all feel about governments.

I hope to be able to report to you in a year that we have made real progress on all fronts - especially in saving our country.

I'd be interested in your comments on maybe how we can do that better.

QUEEN'S PARK REPORT

Explaining insurance bill delay

I know that most of you have heard the announcement from Financial Institutions Minister Brian Charlton that Cabinet has agreed to delay the introduction of auto insurance legislation until the fall. Some of you have already called my office with your concerns and I want to take this opportunity to answer some of your questions about the postponement.

The process of preparing any legislation takes a fair bit of time and there is still work going on with the auto insurance bill. This is a delay and nothing more. Our government is not backing away from our commitments nor retreating in the face of the opposition from the insurance companies. Quite frankly, we are proposing a complex piece of legislation and we want to make sure that the end result meets the needs of the drivers.

In the meantime, we will continue to listen to your concerns and try to implement those viewpoints into the legislation. Just remember though, we are dealing with more than six million drivers, seven million vehicles, 150 insurance companies, and twenty-thousand industry employees directly affected.



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time in years, fourth quarter profit figures for insurance corporations, usually available in April, have been delayed.

We are working on a complete and comprehensive insurance program that will be better than what we have now, more affordable, simpler to understand, available to everyone who drives, and available at affordable prices. Some of you may wonder if the government is considering a BC plan or Quebec system. The Minister has been carefully studying the four Canadian jurisdictions with public auto insurance in order to learn from them but our program will be unique to Ontario because our situation is different from any other Canadian province.

They are entitled to the most comprehensive consideration of issues the government can deliver. You should also remember that if the industry complains of "uncertainty" and "indecision" their concern relates to their profits and not to the needs of drivers. This has been a banner year for insurance industry profits because the no-fault scheme introduced by the previous government provided massive subsidies to car insurers. One of the advantages in taking some extra time to prepare the package is that we will have an opportunity to look at a full year of how the Ontario Motorist Protection Plan works. Strangely enough, for the first

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