

Wednesday, December 4, 1991

Ottawa Report

Taxes and reporters - a volatile mix

This is a short story about taxes and reporters. I'm not sure if there is a moral.

I was walking down a hallway in the Parliament Buildings a week ago, minding my own business, when a reporter came up and put a microphone under my chin.

"Mr. Turner," he said, "what would you do to solve the crisis in agriculture?"

That was no small question. Right now our farmers are facing hard times - the price of their products is low (especially grains) while the cost of doing business keeps going up. We have in-

ternational trading wars going on, and our marketing boards are threatened. Not since the Depression have things been this bad on the farm.

So I answered with a suggestion - maybe the GST should be extended to cover food. That way, the 7 per cent rate could probably be dropped to 6 per cent, and there would still be extra revenue which could go directly to subsidize the farmers.

Why would I say that? Well, two reasons: First, if we let the farmers go bankrupt, then Canadians will end up importing more food, at much higher prices -

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MP
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Progressive Conservative



so why not pay a bit more now in order to maintain our food security?

Second, I have always believed the GST was unfair because it exempted certain things, like groceries. A fair tax would apply to everything, at the lowest possible rate - and it would be simpler and cheaper to administer.

Well, the next day one of the MPs from British Columbia showed me the headline from one of the dailies in Vancouver. There, beside my picture, it said "Tories ponder putting GST on food." Shortly afterwards, stories appeared in newspapers from Toronto to Halifax. My one-minute surprise interview had the phones of MPs across Canada ringing.

Then, last Thursday afternoon, I was driving back to Georgetown from Ottawa. The phone in my car rang, and on the other end of the line was CBC Newsworld TV in Calgary - they wanted to do an interview on this GST on food for the farmers.

I pulled over, and spoke to the network, while they broadcast my voice and a picture of me. Also on the line was some farmer from Manitoba who had been lined up to give instant reaction.

So, here I was, on the side of the 401 near Napanee, talking to a television interviewer half the country away who had heard that a group of MPs, headed by me, had made a formal presentation to the

government on changing the tax system and that the minister in charge of consumer affairs had agreed.

None of it was true. It had all started with a quick comment in a hallway in Ottawa. But the episode made me reflect on how things can quickly get out of control. In this age of instant communications, satellite feeds, cellular phones and media people willing to throw anything at the public with a minimum of research and investigation, well, is it any wonder that we all get overwhelmed?

Next time, I'll just shut up - but I still think the farmers need our help.

My thanks to all those who have been filling out, and returning, the Constituency Survey which I recently sent to people living in this riding of Halton-Peel.

Most surveys are coming back with extensive comments, and that certainly helps me do my job in Ottawa - which is to represent the way people in our community feel about national issues.

I am working now to tabulate the results to each question, and hope to report to you soon on the results. Of course, this report will also go directly to Parliament. Your voices will be heard.

Queen's Park Report

Private Members Bill proposed over quarry landfill issue

I'd like to begin this report by making a few comments about the Acton Quarry Landfill proposal. Over two thousand constituents took the time to write to me on this issue. I tried to answer some of your questions when I wrote back to you on November 5th. I've always been totally opposed to any dumping in the Acton Quarry and my position will not change. I've questioned Environment Minister Ruth Grier in the House on more than one occasion about the R.S.I. proposal. The Minister in turn wrote to me and explained at length the limitations imposed upon her by the Environmental Assessment Act. After receiving her response, I began to look into the possibility of introducing a Private Member's Bill. I'm now in the process of pulling together a number of interested people to work on such a bill. It will be based on the recent decision of the Niagara Escarpment Commission in regards to Amendment 52 - that the Niagara Escarpment is no place to situate a landfill site.

I'd also like to bring you up to date on a few events at Queen's Park. A couple of weeks ago I talked to you about the release of the discussion paper on the Labour Relations Act and our intent of holding consultations in ten locations across the province. You might be interested in knowing the dates for two nearby locations:

Hamilton-Monday, January 20th.

Toronto-Tuesday, February 4th through Thursday, February 6th.

If you wish to make a presentation at the consultation hearings you should send a written request by mail or fax, stating a preferred location, to: OLRA Consultations, Ministry of Labour, Policy Division, 15th Floor, 400 University Avenue, Toronto, Ontario, M7A 1T7. Telephone: (416) 326-7650. Your request must be received no later than 14 days prior to the consultation date. Attendance will be confirmed at least one week prior to the hearing. We expect that representatives of a broad cross-section of groups affected by the proposed

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reform of the OLRA will be involved in the consultations.

Our government is also inviting written submissions on OLRA from all interested parties. These submissions, to be received by the Ministry of Labour no later than Friday, February 14th, should be sent to: Bob Mackenzie, M.P.P., Minister of Labour, Labour Relations Act Reform, 14th Floor, 400 University Avenue, Toronto, Ontario, M7A 1T7. If you have any questions about the process, and how to participate in it, please call Annette Snowdon, Consultation Coordinator, at (416) 326-7400.

I had also discussed the Employee Wage Protection Program in an earlier report and I wanted to let you know that we now have a couple of booklets on hand about the program: one for employers and another for workers.

As you've probably heard, the Sunday Shopping legislation, was given Third Reading on November 21st in the Provincial Legislation. By the time this column appears in your newspaper, some of you may have already taken advantage of the special December provisions for store openings. December accounts for at least a quarter of total annual sales for many retailers and often makes the difference between a profit and a loss on the year's business. The legislation provides for a Common Pause Day the rest of the year. Changes to the Employment Standards Act give retail employees (except for those in the hospitality industry) the absolute right to

refuse any Sunday or holiday assignment throughout the year. Workers who previously agreed to work on such days must give employers 48 hours notice at their request.

Municipalities may enact bylaws that allow stores in tourism areas to open on holidays. A regulation setting out the criteria for these areas has been developed to ensure that the tourism exemption is administered with consistency across the province.

Say: "I saw it in The Herald"

Constitutional reform is about many things.

But mostly it's about you.

As Canadians, we are now facing one of the most important challenges in our history. Proposals have been put forward by the Government of Canada to improve our Constitution. These proposals, for a more united and prosperous Canada in which all Canadians can feel at home, are currently being reviewed by a special parliamentary committee. They will also be considered by a series of conferences run by independent Canadian organizations.

Some of the proposals include:

- ◆ a Canada clause that speaks of our hopes and dreams as Canadians, our values, our diversity, our tolerance and our generosity of spirit

- ◆ recognizing the right of aboriginal peoples to govern themselves while being protected by Canadian law

- ◆ ensuring recognition of Quebec's distinctiveness and of minority language groups

- ◆ reforming the Senate to make it elected, effective and much more equitable than it is now

- ◆ strengthening Canada's economic union so Canadians can work and conduct business anywhere in the country

- ◆ guaranteeing property rights.

Get involved and find out more about how these proposals will shape the future of Canada, call toll-free:



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Deaf or hearing impaired call: 1-800-567-1992 (TTY/TDD)

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