

Ottawa Report

# Town hall meetings are wide-open affairs

Since being elected a little over three years ago, I've held close to 30 Town Hall meetings around the riding of Halton-Peel. Some have been quiet and poorly-attended. Others have been nothing short of explosive, with people spilling out into the hallways.

There have been arguments, shouts, applause and angry speeches. Dorothy has come to dread the events. She finds herself sitting there, getting defensive and, as she says, "taking all your hits."

Each public meeting has its own chemistry, and anything can happen. It all depends on who attends, what people want to talk about, the news of the day or simply how people are feeling. Standing at the front of the room can be a harrowing experience - representing "the government" or "the system" - but it can also be a rewarding one. We have simply had some moving and amazing conversations.

Last week in a hall in rural Milton, for example, about 40 people showed up on a night that had freezing rain to talk about the future of Canada. There were

some people present who argued passionately that Canada should be unified and strong - which they interpreted as being unilingual English. Others were horrified by that vision.

They argued that Canada is special and precious because we are French and English, immigrant and aboriginal all at the same time. There was tolerance at that meeting for two languages and cultures; and there were people who hate to wake up and see French on their cereal boxes.

In Caledon East the next night, downstairs at the community complex (because a dog obedience class had booked the upstairs hall) a few more people came to talk mostly about the economy. The discussion at that meeting was about the "D" word - Depression. Are we in one? That's the question a lot of media people seem to be asking.

In fact, the tone of the meeting had been set by CBC television, which that night ran a feature on the "Dirty Nineties" and started it off with pictures of the human misery that marked the 1930's.

Leaving for the meeting, I'd been personally appalled at the irresponsibility of the CBC's

Garth Turner  
MP  
Halton-Peel  
Progressive  
Conservative



report - figuring it was a cute piece done by a bunch of yuppies born in the 1960 who figured that depression is when you have to buy a used car, instead of a new one.

But, the report took its toll. And when I said to the people at this meeting that - in my opinion - it was absurd to say this is a depression, there were a few cat

calls suggesting that the guy at the front of the room was just another politician who was insulated from reality.

So I responded by saying that when you have a strong social safety net and financial institutions that have never been more profitable, depression is improbable.

But my words meant nothing compared to those of the older man who sprang to his feet and turned his powerful gaze towards those who had just been crying the blues.

"I lived through the Depression," he said, "and it was nothing like this. The problem with you is that you're suffering from greed and selfishness. You have no idea just how good we have it in this country right now."

Then a person rose and said that life had to be better in the States - despite the fact education

and health care are not all covered by taxes - because booze and cigarettes and property taxes are less. In response, another retired person turned around and said, simply, "Good-bye."

Well, at the end of the night, we all left. The discussion continued among knots of people in the hallway and out in the parking lot. Dorothy and I packed up the flag and the brochures and drove home, talking about what people had said and how I should respond.

The blowing snow closed in as we crawled along the 17th Sideroad. The lights of town were welcome when they started blinking through the weather. At home, the dog was excited to see us. He hadn't thought about either the economy or the constitution all night - which was a relief.

## Queen's Park Report Fiscal honesty

For the first time in Ontario's history, the Premier of Ontario addressed the people of the Province about the fiscal problems facing our government. It is also the first time that a government has opened the province's books before the budget.

Our government believes it is every Ontarian's right to see the government's balance sheet. People need to know what is going on in the province to understand the tough choices we are all facing. The economy is going to get better. But recovery will take time. We also promised to open up the budget process and the Premier's address is part of that openness.

We believe in open government. And we think it is important for the public to understand the economic reality we all face. As far as our government is concerned, it is your right to know what is happening to the government's balance sheet, and your tax dollar.

The premier outlined to the people of the Province, that for the first time since 1945, the government received less money from taxes than it did the year before. According to the balance sheet, unless we make real changes this year our operating deficit will be too high. Bob Rae was clear. And I will be clear too. That this situation is unacceptable to our government, so we are doing all we can to reduce the deficit from the 1991 level.

Part of our solution involves each person making a contribution to help the province through these tough times. We need to work together. We all need to look at our budgets to see where we can make changes and where we can restructure. We made the tough decision to limit the increase in funds to agencies like municipalities, schools and hospitals to one per cent this year and two per cent in 1993 and 1994.

That is why reconstruction of services is our goal. The alternative - cutting and slashing of services - is unacceptable. We know these agencies deliver services which are essential to your well being. We are helping transfer agencies in two important ways to adapt and deliver affordable, quality public services.

We have set aside \$160 million to help them adjust in the first year. This money is earmarked strictly to encourage them to develop innovative plans for

Noel Duignan  
Halton North  
MPP  
New Democratic  
Party



maintaining service and meeting their fiscal targets. In addition, to give transfer agencies a better opportunity to plan ahead, we have told them what money they can expect from Queen's Park in the next three years.

For our part, we are changing the way we work. In October, we imposed a freeze on the salaries of politicians and senior civil servants. We also cut the operating budgets for ministries by 10 per cent. And there will not be any inflationary increases for ministries either. We began reviewing 23 of the largest government programs last fall, and we are looking at ways to make these programs more effective and more efficient.

The government's recent tentative agreement with its employees to limit their wage increase to 1 per cent in the first year, shows the labour movement is willing to make a contribution towards recovery in Ontario.

Building a fairer society, with good public services, must not get put on hold, especially in tough times. We will not forget our commitment to helping the people of Ontario. People from all walks of life rely on the government to play a role in our economy. We must maintain our health insurance system, and make investments in schools, bridges and roads. By investing in Ontario, we are investing in our people, and we can save jobs and create new ones.

Our focus is jobs. We are getting the province moving through initiatives such as better skills training programs, and more support for industries that build on our resources of a skilled and well-educated workforce. We are giving top priority to the research and development that will bring new jobs to Ontario. We are developing the infrastructure of our province.

- Guaranteed Pricing
- Quality Service
- Name Brands
- Great Selection
- In Stock

# MATTRESS SALE

## FACTORY DIRECT PRICES

Save on Our Entire Collection

\$499.95

POSTURE PROMO \*Single Size

MATTRESS OR BOX

FREE DELIVERY

Also Available At SPECIAL PRICES

<p><b>*140*</b> MATTRESS Complete Set <b>*189*</b> F1000</p>	<p><b>*164*</b> MATTRESS Complete Set <b>*219*</b> F2000</p>	<p><b>*224*</b> MATTRESS Complete Set <b>*299*</b> CHIROPRACTIC</p>
--	--	---

# Emerald Isle Bedroom Gallery

130 Guelph St.
Georgetown
873-2753