

Four councillors support Grit uploading platform

By **CYNTHIA GAMBLE**
Staff Writer

Backed by four members of Halton Hills council, Liberal candidate Moya Johnson warned Friday a Tim Hudak-led PC provincial government would mean higher municipal taxes.

"Property taxes will definitely increase in the Halton Hills area under Tim Hudak and PC candidate Ted Arnott as they cut services and download onto municipalities," said Johnson. "The Hudak PCs are dangerous for those of us who pay property taxes."

But PC candidate Ted Arnott said in an interview that's completely false.

"The Liberal candidate is attempting to distract voters from the Liberal record on taxes, and her press release contains statements which are inaccurate and misleading," said Arnott.

In a press conference Friday morning, Johnson said PC Leader Hudak at the recent Association of Ontario Municipalities (AMO) conference stated he would review

an uploading agreement currently between municipalities and the Liberal government. That 2008 agreement, committed the Province to upload social assistance benefits and court security costs from municipal property taxes back to Provincial financial control. It was drafted after the former PC-led government downloaded \$3 billion of provincial social and court programs to municipal taxpayers, said Johnson.

While the Liberals, NDP and Green Party leaders reaffirmed their commitment to the remaining years of the deal, the PC leader did not. On the AMO website, Hudak would also not give assurances that he would not download costs or add new ones to municipalities' property tax base.

"The translation of that is that uploading will stop and the downloading will start," said Johnson.

Arnott called that twisting the truth.

"Tim Hudak has articulated no downloading scheme which will drive up your property taxes," he said. "He essentially said he would maintain the uploading of costs which has taken place to date, but he couldn't guarantee the policy of gradually uploading more costs could be carried forward in the coming years, until we learn the true financial picture of the Province after the election."

Backing Johnson on this issue were four members of Halton Hills council— Mayor Rick Bonnette and Councillors Jane Fogal, Jon Hurst and Ann Lawlor.

The three councillors have all endorsed Johnson's candidacy— Fogal even nominated Johnson. Bonnette said, while he is not endorsing any candidate or party, he is firmly on side on the uploading issue.

Fogal, Lawlor and Bonnette were all at the AMO conference too and heard Hudak's comments.

"There are some areas where Hudak is in agreement (with municipalities) and provides some of the answers we want. But there is a key one here on uploading that he's not on side with," said Fogal. "That's why we're here today."

As chair of Halton Region's administration and finance committee, Fogal said, "we seen over the last few years that the Region's budget has come in at zero per cent increase and that's largely because of the uploading that has been going on. Each

year it provides us with the tax room to come in at zero. But as soon as that uploading stops, our budget is going to be impacted. Either we would have to cut services or we would have to have an increase."

Bonnette pointed out when the PC-led provincial government forced the 905 municipalities to pay the City of Toronto's social services costs, also known as "pooling", Halton Hills taxpayers' share was \$4.1 million each year.

"I'm here as a very concerned person to ensure the uploading continues. Because downloading is the most secretive tax there is," Bonnette said.

"Halton Hills is counting on the continued uploads and support that was agreed to with the Liberal provincial government and Ontario municipalities," said Bonnette, adding he would like to see a similar commitment from the other parties.

Arnott said, "I would hope that the uploading of social services costs can continue in the coming years. Notwithstanding Liberal election promises, it is also true that whoever forms the next government will have its options limited by the reality of the massive provincial deficit, which is at least \$16 billion."

NDP candidate Dale Hamilton said the NDP will work with the municipal leaders on a positive plan to make life affordable and to make the municipalities work including continuing with the upload of costs for social assistance and court security. Hamilton said, as a former municipal councillor for the Township of Eramosa, she understands the impact provincial decisions can have on municipalities.

Green Party candidate Raymond Dartsch said, "The last time Tim Hudak and his party were in power, Ontario's municipalities took a brutal fiscal clobbering. Ontario voters who pay property taxes, or who pay rent to an owner who pays property taxes, should be cautious."

For more information visit the AMO website: www.amo.on.ca

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Councillors, from left, Jane Fogal, Jon Hurst, Mayor Rick Bonnette and Ann Lawlor support Liberal candidate Moya Johnson's (centre) position on provincial uploading.

Photo by Cynthia Gamble

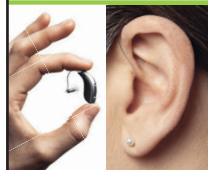
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