

Opinion

Prices at the pumps

Prices at gas pumps in the United States went up by 9 or 10 cents a gallon due, the experts said, to the crisis in the Middle East. But Americans didn't accept it graciously. They complained the oil companies were gouging them. Many called for government intervention, although prices in the U.S. are only half ours.

One service station operator refused to raise his prices and the oil company consequently denied him any gasoline. Public sympathy, of course, was with the operator. He was lionized as a "true American," an apostle of free enterprise. The state investigated.

Compare the commotion in the U.S. to that in Canada where motorists see pump prices increase by as much as 6 cents a litre from one day to the next. That translates into about 24 cents an American gallon.

Canadians stoically accept the ups and downs of gasoline pricing from 50.9 cents a litre of regular unleaded to as high as 57.9 cents with hardly a whimper. We know that every time gas prices hike governments are there with hands out to take their share. It's called an ad valorem tax.

No use appealing to the Province because it benefits every time prices increase. Queen's Park has a vested interest in keeping prices high.

That wouldn't be so bad if all the money governments collect went into improved roads and safety features but it goes into the general account to be distributed at the whim of the treasurer. Perhaps it even goes to a more deserving cause but it all translates into taxing the motorist unfairly. It certainly doesn't fall into the realm of user pay.

Now the Persian Gulf crisis has erupted we're bound to see gasoline prices rise higher. The ad valorem tax will send them even higher, contributing again to the inflation rate, which in turn keeps interest rates high, which in turn contributes to a recession and bankruptcies, etc., etc.

It's that "vicious circle" we hear so much about and which we accept with an equanimity our American friends would never understand.—H.C.



Reflections of Summer

Our Readers Write

Candidates support request for environmental wetlands assessment

Dear editor,

Candidates in Halton North would support a request to the Ministry of the Environment for a comprehensive environmental assessment to determine the cumulative impact of projects proposed by the Region of Halton upon the Wetlands area in the Silver Creek Valley.

At the all-candidates Environmental Forum held at Sacre Coeur Church hall in Georgetown on August 21, 1990 Progressive Conservative candidate David Whiting said, "All too often different levels of government are doing assessments of one area but miss the point of the total impact." He added that where an area is subject to a number of small projects, it's not right to do an environmental assessment only on each one. It ignores the effect of the other, he stated.

"I would give my full support to any group wanting to get a 'bump up.' It's too late to do the assessment after the trunk sewer is built. It must be looked at as a total picture."

The concern was raised during the question period at the Forum that there may be cumulative negative effect on the Class 2 Wetlands area in the Silver Creek Valley as a result of various projects proposed in close proximity to the Wetlands. They include proposals by the Region of Halton to reconstruct Main Street and Mountainview Road, and to conduct a test well project.

Candidates were asked whether they would

support a request by residents for a "bump up" to the Ministry of the Environment under legislation affecting the trunk sewer proposal. If granted, a bump up would result in a more rigorous assessment of the project.

The NDP candidate, Noel Duignan, said he, too, would support such a request. "You can count on my whole hearted support to fight your case as far as it has to go," he said. He added that there is a need for an Environmental Bill of Rights to give citizens the final say in relation to the environment.

Walt Elliot, the Liberal incumbent said whoever gets elected should "get on top of the project." The elected person should get involved in the process and ensure folks are heard, he said.

Guiseppe Gori of the Family Coalition Party, Green Party candidate Patricia Kannerer and the Libertarian candidate John Shadbolt also indicated support for the residents and opposition to the destruction of the Wetlands.

A recent report regarding a Greenlands Strategy for the Greater Toronto Area, released by Ron Kanter, MPP for St. Andrew-St. Patrick, states that "51 per cent of wetland areas in the Greater Toronto area have been lost, while much of the remainder continues to be subject to intense pressure as a result of increased urbanization."

Marilyn E. King,
Spokesperson for residents
concerned about the trunk sewer.

Preaching and practising

The fact Members of Parliament recently approved an increase of approximately 30 per cent to each of their expense accounts shows federal MPs preach a lot about wage restraint but practising it is another matter.

The recent raise - some \$6,000 per year in tax-free expense money - was quietly given approval in principle by the House of Commons Board of Internal Economy. If the increase goes through as planned, it will boost each MP's expense money by just under a third. It will bring the total personal expense tab for each MP to \$26,600 per year (in addition to a basic annual salary of \$62,100).

The fact federal representatives have seen fit in these economic times to enhance expense accounts by 30 per cent pales in comparison to their sense of timing.

Wasn't it just recently that federal Finance Minister Michael Wilson was seen in the media urging every Canadian to tighten their belt to help battle the federal deficit and inflation? And hasn't Prime Minister Brian Mulroney frequently been heard encouraging Canadian workers not to demand pay raises in anticipation of the one-time jump in inflation caused by the proposed 7 per cent Goods and Services Tax?

No wonder Canadians increasingly feel their elected representatives are out of touch with reality.

TERRY O'SHAUGHNESSY, Federation of Independent Business

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