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Leadership race a daunting task

My life seems to have gone into overdrive.

I usually sit down to write this column on Sunday. When I wrote the last article, I said this: "Reports in the media say it is impossible for anyone to compete with Kim Campbell, who has obviously been campaigning for some time now. As I call people around the country, they are supportive of my goal to stimulate debate and work for

changes to our cracked political system, but they also say I can't win."

Shortly after I sent that to the newspaper, three cabinet ministers who everybody thought would run to be the next prime minister backed out - because they also thought they couldn't win.

It was then, before last week's column had even printed, that I decided to enter the race. Jean

Ottawa Report



Garth Turner

Charest declared his candidacy on Tuesday night, and I declared mine on Wednesday morning. Now there are three of us in the running to be leader of the Conservative party, with more likely to come.

I lived some of my most difficult moments last week. Standing before a roomful of reporters and television cameras, I gave a live, 30 minute press conference in both english and french. Frankly, I was concerned about my ability to be fluent enough in french and - wouldn't you know it? - the first string of questions for me all came from Quebec journalists. But I survived.

The next day I walked into my office in Ottawa to be told I had caused a crisis on Prince Edward Island. Sitting on my desk was a copy of the main story in that morning's edition of the Charlottetown daily. Beside a front page picture of me was a headline saying "Turner questions need for PEI government".

As people ran around my office clutching pink wads of phone messages - even the prime minister's office was in turmoil - it became clear what had happened. A wire service reporter took a comment of mine from a story about me in the Vancouver Sun out of context and then recycled it for the PEI market. He never bothered to call me directly.

So, I found myself that night on the evening TV news in Charlottetown reassuring Islanders that as PM I would not abolish them. It was an interesting launch to the campaign.

Well, the week ended on a different note. In Georgetown, a roomful of people came out on a snowy Saturday morning to volunteer time, money and services to help me. They are joining volunteers now in BC, Alberta, Nova Scotia, Toronto, Eastern and Southwestern Ontario and, yes, even PEI.

I am running in this high-stakes campaign for the same reasons I wanted to be a Member of Parliament. I saw things wrong with my country and I wanted to help fix them. We ought to be balancing our books, having politicians who think of their constituents first and giving more rights and responsibilities to individual Canadians.

That may be simple, but it's enough to keep me fighting. Dorothy and I have an incredible task before us over the next few months - one that is worth doing, despite the outcome.

We don't have a political machine. We have something even more powerful - average people working for change. If you would like to be part of it, well, we sure could use a hand. Call anytime: 1-800-268-8679.



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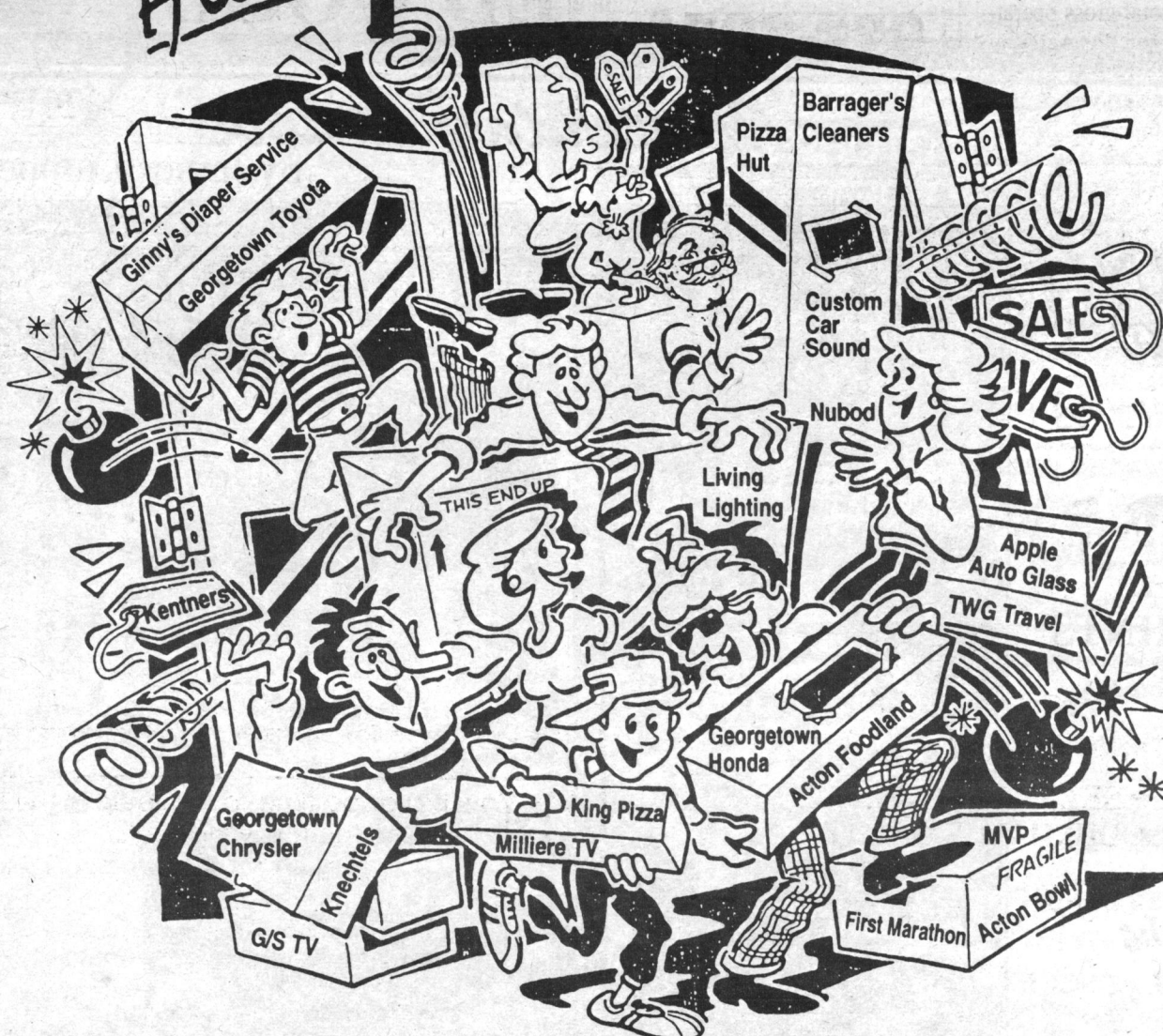
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