

NAFTA comes under public fire

This week I want to give you an update on the findings of the Cabinet Committee on the proposed North America Free Trade Agreement. After just a few days of public hearings, the members are learning first-hand that the deal isn't very popular with many residents of Ontario.

Committee Chair, Elmer Buchanan, summed up the week's activities by remarking, "Overall, people have been telling us that NAFTA is going to hurt Ontario. Too many Ontarians are telling us that this is one trade deal that spells doom and gloom."

The six-member Cabinet Committee, which includes Howard Hampton, Shirley Coppen, Gilles Bisson, Kimble Sutherland and Irene Mathysen, completed its first week of hearings March 10th in Windsor. Committee hearings had opened in Toronto on March 8th before traveling to Hamilton the following day. Last week, committee members turned their sights northward as they set off for three days of hearings in Thunder Bay, Sault Ste. Marie and Sudbury.

Groups and individuals who have suffered under the Canada - U.S. Free Trade Agreement say they expect economic conditions to deteriorate even further for working people if NAFTA comes into effect. In fact, in the first three days, more than 50 groups and individuals made presentations to the committee. Another 30 to 40

Queen's Park report



Noel Duignan

presentations were expected during the northern leg of the committee's tour.

While a handful of speakers spoke in favor of NAFTA during the first three days of hearings - arguing that Canada's trade picture has improved under the Canada - U.S. Free Trade Agreement - a majority of the witnesses told committee members that FTA has been bad for the economy and that NAFTA promises more of the same.

Perhaps the most moving evidence the committee heard, I'm told, was from Gary St. Laurent, the former union chair at Kelsey-Hayes, a wheel making plant in Windsor that shut its doors for

good in 1990, a fatality of the Canada - U.S. trade deal. Speaking about his former co-workers, who found themselves out of work, St. Laurent said, "They've lost their homes, they've lost their boats to go fishing with, they've lost their cars, they've lost their families. I feel inside of me that we've had at least three suicides at Kelsey-Hayes since we went down in 1990."

In Toronto, Leo Gerard, Canadian Director of the United Steelworkers of America, told a large gathering at the hearings that Canada should avoid signing any deal with the U.S. and Mexico until after a federal election. "That should be the democratic way to decide," he said.

Labor groups weren't the only organizations appearing before committee members. Environmentalists, women's groups, farm groups, equity seeking groups and individuals also made their views known. A special highlight of the Hamilton hearings was the appearance by Arturo Salesas, a guest of the Hamilton & District Labor Council, who spoke about working and about environmental standards in the Maquiladoras (factory zones) region for northern Mexico.

Here's a reminder that I'm holding office hours in Acton on March 26th. Give my Milton office a call at 878-1729 if you want to set up an appointment to meet with me at the A.S.S.I.C. offices.

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Town requests Activan subsidy

A subsidy allocation of \$38,140 from the Ontario Ministry of Transportation will be requested by the Town of Halton Hills to help offset the cost of operating the ActiVan service this year for physically disabled persons. The subsidy funding request was supported by resolution at council's

Council Briefs

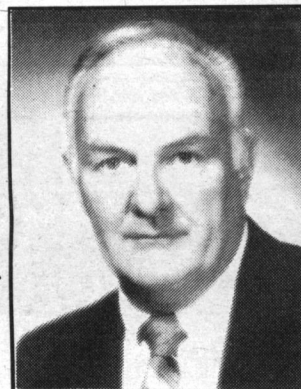
general committee meeting, Monday night.

The projected total gross operating expenditure for the ActiVan service is \$77,680. Estimated revenue from user fares is \$5,300.

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