

EDITORIAL

with Hartley Coles

Budget musings

Irish comedian Hal Roach says there is a sign outside a Dublin funeral home which proclaims: "Trust me. I'll be the last person to let you down."

Obviously from the adverse reactions to federal finance minister Paul Martin's budget, which he delivered with much fanfare Monday afternoon, he let quite a few people down, despite the tax cuts and other goodies to business and family benefits.

The Ontario Federation of Labour says the budget has nothing for health, education or people in real need while the affluent will benefit more than is needed. Meanwhile, the premiers of some provinces at least are fulminating about the less than expected transfer of funds for health care. Others had similar reactions, both from the right and the left side of the political spectrum.

It illustrates how difficult it is to satisfy everyone with a budget for a country as wide and varied as Canada. There certainly were some good points in the budget especially the restoration of full indexation to the personal income tax system. This should eliminate "bracket creep" or automatic tax increases fueled by inflation which allowed the government to tax us from the back door.

The reduction for middle income taxpayers of a tax rate to 23% from 26% should also grant some much needed tax relief, as well as lower tax rates for business in high tech and growth sectors. The downside of all these measures is that they are all part of a five year tax reduction plan. Consequently, we'll only see part of the \$58 billion in cumulative tax relief after June 1 of this year.

Government handouts proclaim that personal income taxes are being cut by an average of 15% for all taxpayers and by an average of 18% annually for low and middle income Canadians. But that's after five years. It certainly is a cautious approach when the government is wallowing in an anticipated \$105 billion surplus. The budget certainly does not contain some of the bold initiatives some anticipated.

For some of us who don't fit into the usual mold the tax cuts will only balance the increase in municipal taxes and possible hike in hydro rates. When you factor in the huge increase in gasoline prices we're probably going to end up on the minus side. Of course, if there were no tax cuts at all we would have been in much worse straits.

But Halton MPP Ted Chudleigh is holding out some hope. Now the federal government has taken the first step in cutting taxes, emulating Ontario, it needs to be matched by a municipal tax cut. He is calling on municipal leaders in Halton to engineer a property tax cut, pointing out he recently insisted that Milton Council use their portion of revenues (\$2.5 million) as host community of Mohawk Raceway's casino, to reduce local taxes.

Since Halton Hills does not share in the revenue from Mohawk perhaps it explains why we face a municipal tax increase. If they are necessary to retain the present level of service most of us would support it. However, we have to agree with Mr. Chudleigh when he says in a release, "It is a question of what services should be provided and what level of services is appropriate."

When politicians cut and slash with nary a thought of the consequences we often wind up having problems such as we are experiencing now with the health care system, doctor shortages, etc., etc. We would have hoped the federal Liberals would have done more with health care to help solve what has become a crisis. However, they have left the door open to cut a deal with the provinces who share a large part of the responsibility for the poor condition of the health care system now.

Since most of us view the budget from our own particular set of circumstances, there are those who will find the federal budget set on the right track to improve the fiscal health of the country. There will be others like this writer who would have liked to have seen a bolder, more aggressive budget, than was tabled Monday. We can only hope that future budgets will allow the government to be more liberal.



PEEK AT THE PAST: In 1952 the old Acton Public School had grown so much a new addition was required. The large enrolment, 457 children and 13 teachers, swelled the old building. So a new addition located grades 1,2,3 and 8 and a double kindergarten there. Staff then shown here included, left to right, front: Jane Gamble, Kay Alger, Principal G.W. McKenzie, Mrs. Wyman Little; middle row: Shirley Elliot, Dena Braida, ???, Daisy Folster, Isabel Anderson, ???; back row: Ralph McKeown, Vice Principal Elmer Smith and Frank Elliott.

A tribute to Bea Benson

By Carol (Somerville) Murphy

Although always familiar with the Bensons through their shoe store and Church, Bea and I became better acquainted when the girls and I moved to Mill Street East almost 10 years ago. However, two childhood memories stand out in my mind... our family buying the Benson piano from them, and the pleasure we got from the music that now filled our home (but not necessarily the lessons or hours of practicing.) Now, the third generation of Somervilles is enjoying the piano.

When I was 15, I wanted a pair of cowboy boots in the worst way. I was in 4-H and that is what you wore when you were showing cattle. I remember going down to the store, explaining my request to Bill and he was most helpful. He didn't think I was strange! Of course, not a being seller in Acton, there were none to in stock. We went through a catalogue and I selected a black pair with blue stitching. About three weeks later he called. The order was in. Bea happened to be at the store than, and made such a fuss as I proudly modelled my new boots and forked over my hard earned \$35.

We slowly re-connected when we became neighbours. We would have chats on the sidewalk, in the porch and the living room. A visit with her was always so encouraging and uplifting... if she was discouraged or depressed, she wouldn't let on, and was more concerned about you, the visitor. She was always so interested in what was going on around town, what was happening with people and the births, death and marriages. I know it saddened her that so many

people of her age suffered before they passed on, and I am so thankful that was not her situation. We joked about the "Shoemaker Report" of the "Blue Spring Report" and I am so very sorry that she is the subject of the report today.

Bea was a caring and loving Mom to Wayne and Donna, June and Carl and proud grandma to Kristy, Darryl and Ben a... and their launch into adulthood and their accomplishments in education, baseball and hockey, football and school plays — and to Darryl... his best friend and a long distance cooking consultant.

We would often talk about Acton and Rockwood of the past... people and events and how the town and neighbourhood had changed. Years ago, how she could sit in the front porch and look at the orchard across the street and the fields out behind. The changes in the business community — their work at Baxter's and later the shoe store. Acton was near and dear to her heart, and it grieved her to see the lack of business development in town, the changing neighbourhood and the moral destruction of our society through drugs and vandalism. She enjoyed getting out and "keeping an eye" on things.

In our neighbourhood, the little kids (and big ones too) revered and honoured her... Alicia and little Sara and Brody calling out to "Aunt Bea," showing off their bicycle riding or their creative talents with sidewalk chalk or going into the porch to visit with her.

Little things in life pleased her so much... a call or visit from a friend, a ride downtown, fresh tomatoes, car-

rots, strawberries or raspberries from my garden, a joke, coffee at Horton's, some cookies, a country drive, "passing the time of day", the news, watching the Fall Fair parade from her front porch, new magazines, something different for supper, time at the cottage, thankful she lived in Canada and not some other poor country, or any act of kindness or gesture. She got her very first pair of "blue jeans" in 1998 and wore them ever so proudly.

Before Christmas, we took a drive to Milton, and then drove around the Dufferin Quarry. She was amazed at the size of the hole, and the huge operation there. She had no idea that was "most interesting". She kept up to date with the current events through TV and reading. If you missed the weather report, you could call her and she would know what was going to happen in the next few days. She and I would consult on where she thought "that darn grass" was ready and set the time for me to come down. I know it frustrated her to watch me work while she had to supervise. An invitation in, and refreshments were an important part of helping her out.

And often, in her own gentle way, had an opinion on what was happening in current events. She would want to know my thoughts, and we would banter back and forth. She enjoyed New Year's Eve 1999, seeing the new century in, and watched the events and celebrations unfold across Canada.

And the things she hated... going to the Bank, the IGA parking lot, the neighbours' cats, the squirrels

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