

# Catholic board delays budget decision

By DENNIS SMITH

Special to The Independent/Free Press

Catholic trustees have put on hold the traditional practice of having their board match the Halton Board of Education's mill rate increase.

The Halton Roman Catholic School Board voted 12-5 to delay committing to matching mill rates until their finance committee meeting Monday night. Catholic officials are hoping to complete their operating budget by April 6.

Since the public school board was

slated to approve its increase last (Thursday) night, Catholic trustees thought it would be prudent to wait and see. A hike of 3 - 3.5 per cent is anticipated.

"I don't like to agree to what I don't know about," said Burlington trustee Miriam van de Vrande. "This should be the last step and not the first."

But board treasurer Joe Birrett warned that if the board's requisition for increased levies was not made by the end of March, it could be foregoing receiving

millions of dollars until June.

During debate it was noted that setting a different mill rate could spark an unhealthy competition with the public school board.

But many trustees were far more concerned about the latest budget numbers they faced.

The board is required to balance its operating budget, but a deficit between \$449,000 and \$2.86 million was projected, based on a 1.34 per cent mill rate hike.

Some trustees were particularly galled that these numbers have followed a budget 'windfall' of \$3.7 million, resulting from lower tuition fees and increased grants.

"We seem to have the ability that soon after we have money in our pockets, its gone," said Milton trustee Joe Deoni. "This is supposed to be a time of restraint."

Birrett explained that \$3.5 million in maintenance programs have been put into the operating budget. In other years, maintenance costs have been debentured, he said.

Van de Vrande said the possibility of a balanced budget with a zero increase should at least be considered.

She was told that a zero increase would cost another \$1.25 million, which would require about \$4 million in deficit cutting altogether.

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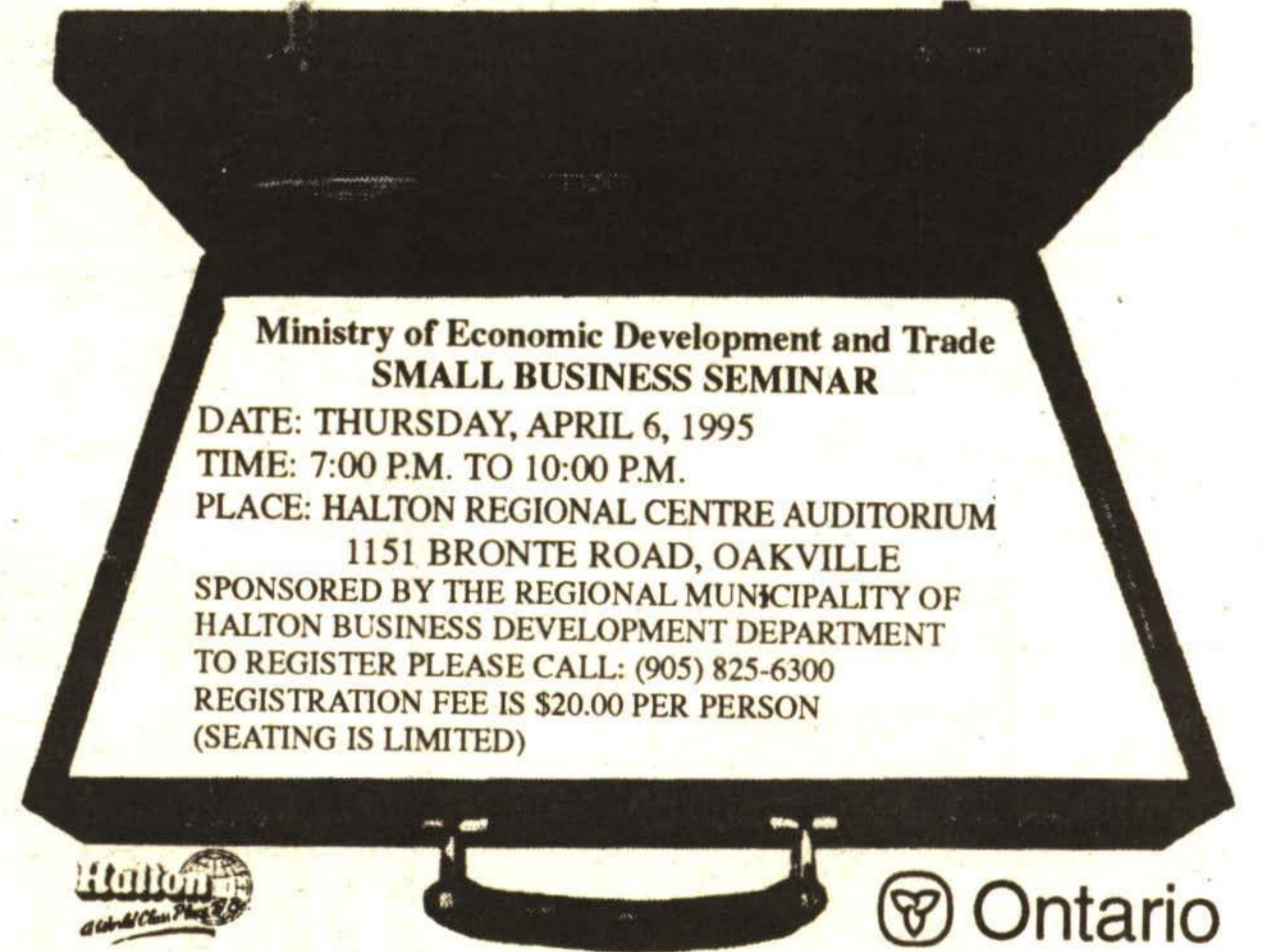
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