

Rookie Parliamentarian Chong eager to get to work in Ottawa

Wellington-Halton Hills MP Mike Chong has only been on the job for two and half months, but he's already working on requests by more than 40 constituents.

Chong updated *The Independent & Free Press* on his early days as the first MP in this newly created riding as well as his plans when Parliament opens for business next month, at town hall meeting at the Acton Arena and Community Centre Sept. 16. About a half dozen residents turned out for the two-hour meet-and-greet.

"The job has been exciting," he said as he described his last nine weeks.

Over the summer he has attended service club meetings, special events and local council meetings. He also hosted Wellington and Halton Hills municipal representatives at the Association of Municipalities of Ontario conference in Ottawa this summer. He took them on a tour of the Parliament buildings and listened to their issues, and "gave them that feel we're there to help them out."

Last week, Chong and Halton Hills Mayor Rick Bonnette met one-on-one to discuss a number of issues including the provincial government's greenbelt policy, federal/provincial funding for municipalities and the ongoing saga of the Georgetown hospital.

Health care in this riding is front and centre, he said. While he didn't know the details of the new federal/provincial accord on health care announced that day, he wondered how relevant a national pharmacare program is when a family doesn't have a doctor to prescribe the medication.

"I think we need to address problems in the basic delivery of health care services, and if we can do that, that would go a long way in solving problems in Acton and Erin," the MP said. There is a severe shortage of doctors in these communities.

The proposed transfer of revenue from the gas tax was another topic of conversation between Bonnette and Chong. The town wants the federal government to transfer the money directly to municipalities—without going through the middleman (the provincial government).

"I agree with their concern. I think the federal government, over the last number of years, has played a declining role in municipal infrastructure funding and I think it needs to re-engage communities across Canada and the way to do that is to directly fund municipal infrastructure program," Chong said.

Chong echoed that sentiment when he introduced himself at Monday's council meeting. He said that a transfer of 1 cent per year could equate to \$750,000 for Halton Hills based on a tentative formula, beginning in 2005.

"While I wouldn't count your chickens before they hatch ... I certainly will be fighting for your interests in Ottawa to ensure the money gets here for much-needed infrastructure," said Chong.

This week, the MP will caucus with his Conservative Party when he will learn about the role he'll play in Ottawa in the coming months. He said he would likely be appointed to at least one committee, and he is eyeing at

least two that he would be interested in serving on—Citizenship and Immigration and Industry, Science and Technology.

The first, Chong said, has relevance to this riding, as he would like to focus on getting recognition for foreign-trained medical professionals, who are unable to get a licence to practise here. These physicians could fill the void of doctor shortage in the riding.

"It's such a waste of talent and resources when these folks are driving taxi cabs and working in professions other than what they were trained for," said Chong.

If he was appointed to the Industry, Science and Technology committee, Chong said he

could contribute his IT (information technology) background because he is one of the few politicians having high-tech sector work experience. He said he would push for Canada to develop an industrial strategy that involves IT jobs—relevant to Wellington-Halton Hills due to the proximity of the Techno-

logy Triangle (Kitchener-Waterloo, Guelph and Cambridge).

But Chong acknowledged he did not want to spread himself too thin when he gets to Ottawa, as his main objective is to be "the voice for Wellington-Halton Hills".

In the meantime, Chong is working on more than 40 case files to resolve constituents' concerns, which vary from permanent residency cards and passports to property taxes.

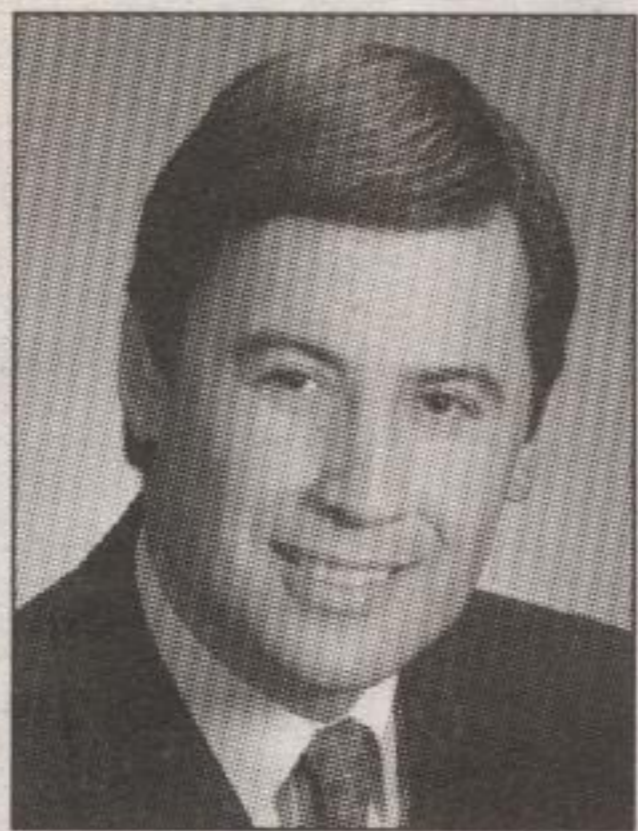
"Our goal is to take every call and try to resolve it. We try not to refer people to 800 numbers but to get them the answers, because I think that's important," Chong said.

Chong launched his official Web site on the weekend, www.mikechong.ca and will open a satellite constituency office in Georgetown on Oct. 1. It will be located at 16 Mountainview Rd. S., Unit 205 (the Carroll Building). While a local phone number has not been set up yet, residents can call him toll-free at 1-866-878-5556.

Chong said he intends to hold two open houses (a.k.a. town hall meetings) a year. He wasn't disappointed with the Acton town hall turnout, saying once people know that this will be a regular pattern, they will come.

—By Cynthia Gamble, staff writer

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WELLINGTON-HALTON HILLS MP MIKE CHONG

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Police to add second deputy

Halton Regional Police Service will soon have a second deputy chief.

The service recently received the go-ahead from Halton Regional Police Services Board to create the new position—Deputy Chief—Administration for the Service.

The new deputy chief will join Chief Ean Algar and Deputy Chief-Operations Gary Crowell on the service's executive management team.

"The second deputy will strengthen the management team and ensure the service's goals and objectives for the community are carried out," said Algar. "It also allows the service to continue with fulfilling our mission—to provide effective and efficient community based policing services."

The board hopes to announce results of its internal recruitment efforts for the job by the end of November.