

# Chong survives first week in the House as rookie cabinet minister

Michael Chong can claim another first in his brief career as a rookie federal cabinet minister.

With the clock ticking down Friday, it appeared the two-term Conservative MP for Wellington-Halton Hills might reluctantly escape the new Parliament's first week of Question Periods without a chance to rise and test his political legs in the House of Commons.

Only a day earlier, the former information technology officer with the National Hockey League Players' Association had the look of a sniper eager to bag his first goal of the season. But with three questions to go Friday morning, the anxious waiting finally ended for the 34-year-old Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and Sport.

"Is the government going to increase our investment in (post-secondary) education," Victoria New Democrat MP Denise Savoie demanded of Chong.

Chong leapt at the opening, stickhandling with the confidence of a minister who knows the government playbook well.

"Our government is committed to working with the provinces, the territories and with business and labour partners to ensure that post-secondary education in Canada continues to be an important priority," he said.

Afterward, a smiling Chong would only admit by the most indirect of means that he was relieved to have his first question out of the way.

"Let me put it to you this way," he said as reporters gathered around him in the Commons foyer. "The anxiety level goes

down after Question Period, yes."

While it was a solid, if not a stellar opening foray, it is also clear he still has his work cut out for him.

Savoie, for one, was not impressed by the answer she had received. She even filed a notice afterward asking for a fuller response in writing.

Liberal MPs are also reserving judgment on Chong's low-profile start to solving the so-called fiscal imbalance.

That imbalance sees Ottawa posting annual surpluses while the provinces struggle to pay their mounting bills for essential services such as health care and education.



**MIKE CHONG**  
MP WELLINGTON-HALTON HILLS

One Liberal insider noted Friday that while Chong is obviously a "bright and very personable" MP, he's also viewed as a "time bomb" who has a habit of speaking with-

out first thinking.

"He's going to have to rein in his outbursts," the Liberal insider said in speaking on background only.

It's Chong's blunt style, however, that has also earned him admirers. Conservative MPs note he has a reputation in their caucus for being willing to pursue the difficult issues behind closed doors.

"In that way he's fearless," said British Columbia Conservative MP John Cummins, who was born and raised in Georgetown and still has family in the area.

"He's not afraid of an issue," Cummins added, "so I think he's a very good choice as a cabinet minister, and I think he'll do very well."

Chong has taken a decidedly methodical approach to his first two months in cabinet. He's been touring the country to gauge the provinces' fiscal situations and their political positions on fixing the fiscal imbalance. It's not surprising, therefore, that he's also thoroughly pleased by his government's workmanlike first week of the 39th parliament.

He termed the Throne Speech as "focused and direct" and expressed pride with Prime Minister Stephen Harper's deft display of confidence and humour on the floor of the House.

"It's been good," Chong said.

"I think (the Throne Speech) shows we're committed to the priorities we talked about during the election campaign and that we're going to work immediately to implement the top five priorities," he added of his government's promise to clean up government, crack down on crime, reduce health-care wait times, cut the GST, and give parents \$1,200 a year for each child under the age of six for child care.

"I think what you're seeing here is a much more focused government that is going to actually accomplish what we talked about during the election campaign," he said.

Chong's only headache of the week may have been an overzealous press secretary who had sparked outrage in the parliamentary press gallery with her physical attempts to protect the minister from the media.

But Chong had evidently addressed that problem by week's end. He was even visibly more relaxed after his chance to perform during question period.

"It was good," he said. "It's different being in government than in opposition. In opposition, the lineup of questions is scheduled and you know exactly when your turn is. In government it's very much different. Each question could be coming your way."

He said he's satisfied with his first offering.

"You never know from day-to-day what issue will pop up and that's the exciting thing about question period," he said.

"It's very, very, very time sensitive. I've been in the House when news broke during Question Period and you have to be on your toes."

—From files of the Guelph Mercury

## Chudleigh decides: Will run in Halton

Halton MPP Ted Chudleigh will run for re-election in the Halton riding during the next provincial election, slated for October 2007.

As a result of his decision, Chudleigh, if elected, will not be representing the residents of Halton Hills. The Town of Halton Hills will be joining much of Wellington County in the new provincial riding of Wellington-Halton Hills. The new riding configuration was in effect for both the 2004 and 2006 federal elections, but not for the last provincial election.

The new Halton riding will consist of Milton and much of north Oakville and northeast Burlington.

"Given that I currently represent the vast majority of residents of the new riding of Halton it seems proper that I pursue that course in my re-election bid," said Chudleigh, a Halton Hills resident. "The new riding of Wellington-Halton Hills consists of a large number of residents which I have not previously represented."

Chudleigh feels a great affinity for Halton Hills and is saddened by the breakup of the current riding, although he said he understands the need to reorganize riding boundaries due to population growth.

"I would like to assure all residents of Halton Hills that I will faithfully execute my duties as their representative until such time as the Legislature is dissolved," said Chudleigh.

"I would like to acknowledge the support of the people of Halton Hills over the years. It is a community that will continue to remain near and dear to me."

Current Waterloo-Wellington MPP Ted Arnott announced his intention last fall to run as a Conservative candidate in Wellington-Halton Hills in the next provincial election.

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