



COMMENT

THE CANADIAN CHAMPION

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A delicate balancing act

There probably weren't too many sympathetic faces in the crowd as Halton North MPP Ted Chudleigh performed an agonizing and delicate balancing act at the Optimist Centre last week.

One veteran political observer thought Mr. Chudleigh blew it by not telling the crowd that he would back them against Queen's Park if Milton District Hospital is radically altered or closed.

That in truth would likely be expecting too much from Mr. Chudleigh, who is after all a member of the government.

Premier Mike Harris would undoubtedly take a dim view of any MPP who told people in his constituency he would buck Cabinet on this highly controversial issue.

Mr. Harris is after all the person who created the Health Services Restructuring Commission. That commission is said to operate at arm's length from the government, but it's mandate is clear. It is to cut costs wherever deemed practical.

On top of that, Mr. Harris is a man who does not appear disposed to tolerating dissension in the ranks. Witness the recent demotions of mavericks.

So Mr. Chudleigh, as a member of the government, cannot really go against the Health Care Restructuring Commission's mandate to score political points at home with angry, worried constituents. To his credit, he did not.

He told the crowd that the process was necessary, would be good for the province in the end, and was regrettable from the human perspective.

That was really all he could say.

There is no question many people are going to be angry, resentful and hurt if there are big changes at Milton District Hospital.

As has been said before, there are many, many hardworking, caring individuals working at and associated with the hospital.

We know no more than anyone else about what will happen in Milton. It is probably unlikely the institution will be closed, just as it is probably unlikely it will remain exactly as it is now.

The Optimist Centre meeting organized last week by a union group at the hospital, offered little in terms of useful insight on that question.

However, to some extent it did show us that Mr. Chudleigh is willing to stick to his guns, unpopular as that may be.

It also showed us how deeply people care about the future of Milton District Hospital — approximately 350 turned out.

Unfortunately, it also illustrated that there is a federal election going on. Reform's Rick Malboeuf didn't put up any signs outside the Optimist Centre but both the Liberals and the Tories did. That was probably a mistake. Although all the federal candidates were invited to the meeting, a bit more decorum would have been in order on this one issue. It smacked of political opportunism, waving signs around (figuratively) while people filed in worried about their jobs and their health care.

Of course the members of these parties take their politics seriously and believe in their respective causes. But that was a little over the top.

— Rob Kelly



Pages of the Past

One Year Ago

From the May 15, 1996 issue

- The Town of Milton was whacked with a 22.4 per cent increase on its municipal insurance plan for 1996. The rate hike came courtesy of the Frank Cowan Company, the municipal insurance firm used by Milton. Al Forbes, a Cowan Company representative, explained that premium increases were averaging 20 to 25 per cent across Canada and that his company was working directly with the Ministry of Municipal Affairs to make changes in the Municipal Act that would limit liability for local governments. Town officials, however, agreed to investigate a tendering process for the upcoming year to see if they could get a better insurance deal.

- Nearly four years of legal battling ended when the Town of Milton agreed to a settlement with Jim Scott, a local compost farmer. The agreement allowed Mr. Scott to continue with his large-scale composting as long as the following conditions were met — that Mr. Scott receive a certificate of approval from the Ministry of the Environment, that landscaping improvements be made to keep the composting operation out of view, that the size of the operation be limited and an end be brought to all legal proceedings.

Neighbouring residents complained vigorously, though, stating the agreement did little to combat the noxious odours emitted from the compost farm.

- Alex Luychx, 13, of Milton was soaring off to the Lego National Championships at Ontario Place. His 'Galactic

Explorer' was chosen from a field of thousands to qualify him for the national lego building challenge. Alex was one of six finalists from across the country.

20 Years Ago

From the May 18, 1977 issue

- Proposals for a new town square were being drawn up by Milton staffers. The square would be a green space in the centre of town on land next to Town Hall on Main Street. The site adjacent to Town Hall, formerly a Sunoco station, had recently been purchased by council. Preliminary plans called for the demolition of the gas station, extensive landscaping and the construction of a small parking lot at the rear.

50 Years Ago

From the May 15, 1947 issue

- A small fire at the Milton Inn was brought under control quickly, but not without giving quite a scare. A blazing mattress was first noticed by Viola Gervas, an employee who smelled smoke as she was working. The fire was put out with a pail of water and only damaged the bed and a few articles of clothing.

- Trafalgar Township council took two steps toward healing its ailing road condition. It decided to appoint a road superintendent and purchased a five-acre plot of land on Concession 5 in Nelson for use as a gravel pit.

Pud

by Steve Nease

