

# Region votes 17-1 to take over ambulance service

• from HALTON on page 1

6 p.m.  
 "I'm delighted. I'm going to celebrate all night now," said Mr. Armes.

"Morale will be sky high as soon as I make a phone call."

Back when the tough decisions first had to be made, regional council opted to begin contract negotiations with the current suppliers.

In Burlington and Oakville, that is Canadian Medical Response (CMR), also known as Halton/Mississauga Ambulance Service (HMAS), which is owned by Laidlaw.

HMAS employs about 90 full-time and 30 part time paramedics. About half of those work in Halton.

Milton and Halton Hills is covered by the volunteer Halton Hills Ambulance Service

(HHAS).

That service employs about 50 paramedics, 22 of which serve part-time.

Delivering seamless service through the down-loading transition period was the idea behind contracting the service out to current suppliers.

That option would also have bought the Region time to look more closely at the possibility of taking the job in-house at some point in the future.

But a number of things have changed since that decision was made.

One was an extension of the take-over deadline by the Province to January 1, 2001.

And another is that Laidlaw has put the American arm of its ambulance services up for sale.

That led to fears that the Canadian branch

would be the next on the chopping block.

And assurances by CMR area general manager Diane Dennis-Finley to the contrary didn't appear to dispel the concern.

"For us, it's business as usual," said Ms Dennis-Finley.

"Laidlaw is supporting us in our efforts to grow CMR. I wanted to lay that to rest right away."

But that didn't convince Ian Sudlow, a paramedic with HMAS.

"Our healthcare system in Canada is highly regulated," he said. "So how does CMR expect to make a profit? We see a privately operated ambulance service as a no win situation for the residents of Halton and the paramedics who serve them."

But Ms Dennis-Finley said that as the employ-

er, the region would always have the last say in ambulance service.

"You have more flexibility from us. You have the ultimate accountability — you can fire us," she said.

But true accountability would be the result of a regionally-run service, said Mr. Armes.

"We believe with commitments to excellence, a regionally run ambulance service would be able to offer the highest quality of paramedic service," he said.

"The paramedics of Halton still feel the need for a publicly run and publicly accountable ambulance service."

And council appeared to agree, voting 17-1 to bring the operation in-house.

Only Burlington Councillor Jack Dennison stood in opposition.



**Halton Health Care Corporation, formerly the Oakville Trafalgar and Milton District Hospitals, is jeopardizing local hospital services.**

**Hospital administrators want to impose sub-standard wages and contract-out hospital services to the private sector.**

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