

Federal candidates face off at punchy meeting

All-candidates meeting held at Muddy Duck Banquet Hall

By IRENE GENTLE
The Champion

Mud-slinging was kept to a minimum last night as Halton candidates in the November 27 federal election matched wits and party platforms at the Muddy Duck Banquet Hall.

But the federal hopefuls couldn't resist throwing the odd elbow into the policies of opposing parties throughout the three-hour face off.

PC candidate Tom Kilmer emerged as the punchiest of the lot, taking frequent shots at both current MP Julian Reed and Canadian Alliance candidate Tim Dobson.

Some digs were subtle, such as his assertion that Canadians want "a leader who can provide the kind of leadership you can be comfortable with."

He placed the emphasis on the word "comfortable," playing up fears some have expressed about CA leader Stockwell Day.

He also accused the CA of zigging and zagging on their flat tax policies, and of being an American-style right-wing party.

As for the Liberals, Mr. Kilmer said they just haven't been there for their constituents.

"You haven't had someone stand up for you in Ottawa since 1993," he said.

Mr. Dobson also took aim at the current government, but stopped short of outright attacks.

"I'm running because I believe you deserve better government than we're getting right now," he said to the crowd. "Let's send a very clear message to Ottawa."

Mr. Reed fired back by accusing the CA of wanting to put 12 year olds in jail and of championing a 10-tier health care system.

Mr. Dobson responded to the latter, saying "The only two people I've heard taking about a 10-tier system are Julian Reed and (Health Minister) Allan Rock. We're certainly not talking about it."

NDP candidate Brenda Dolling outlined a spending plan that would put national childcare, housing and environmental programs in place.

The latter met the approval of Green Party candidate Tom Adams. But he objected to the NDP's tax levels.

He said the Green Party would do away with income tax completely for anyone earning less than \$100,000 per year.

Revenue would instead come from taxing environmental enemies such as gasoline, urban sprawl and polluters.

Mr. Adams, who holds an MBA in finance, also championed

electoral reform, calling for proportional representation over the current system.

"About 38 per cent of Canadians voted Liberal, but we have a Liberal majority," he said, earning cheers from the audience. "Half the people didn't vote for them, but they rule like dictators."

In contrast, discontented murmurs slid behind several of Mr. Reed's responses. But the lid came off after Mr. Kilmer dared Mr. Reed to say the name of the arguably unpopular Prime Minister Jean Chretien aloud.

"I notice you haven't said the name of your leader," said Mr. Kilmer. "I challenge you to do that now."

When Mr. Reed responded by repeating in a fiery tone "Jean Chretien" three times, the audience erupted in a mixed chorus of boos and applause.

Liberal business repayment programs and Human Resources department spending came under attack, with Mr. Kilmer noting "the government doesn't create jobs. They just play candyman all over the country."

In a rare show of unity, Mr. Dobson added "the current administration perhaps views fountains and golf courses and hotels as infrastructure, I don't know."

He said his government would minimize the role of the federal government.

"We'd allow the provinces to have more autonomy in those areas the constitution says to have more autonomy," promised Mr. Dobson.

But handing down powers to the provinces could tear the fabric of Canada's social programs, argued Ms Dolling.

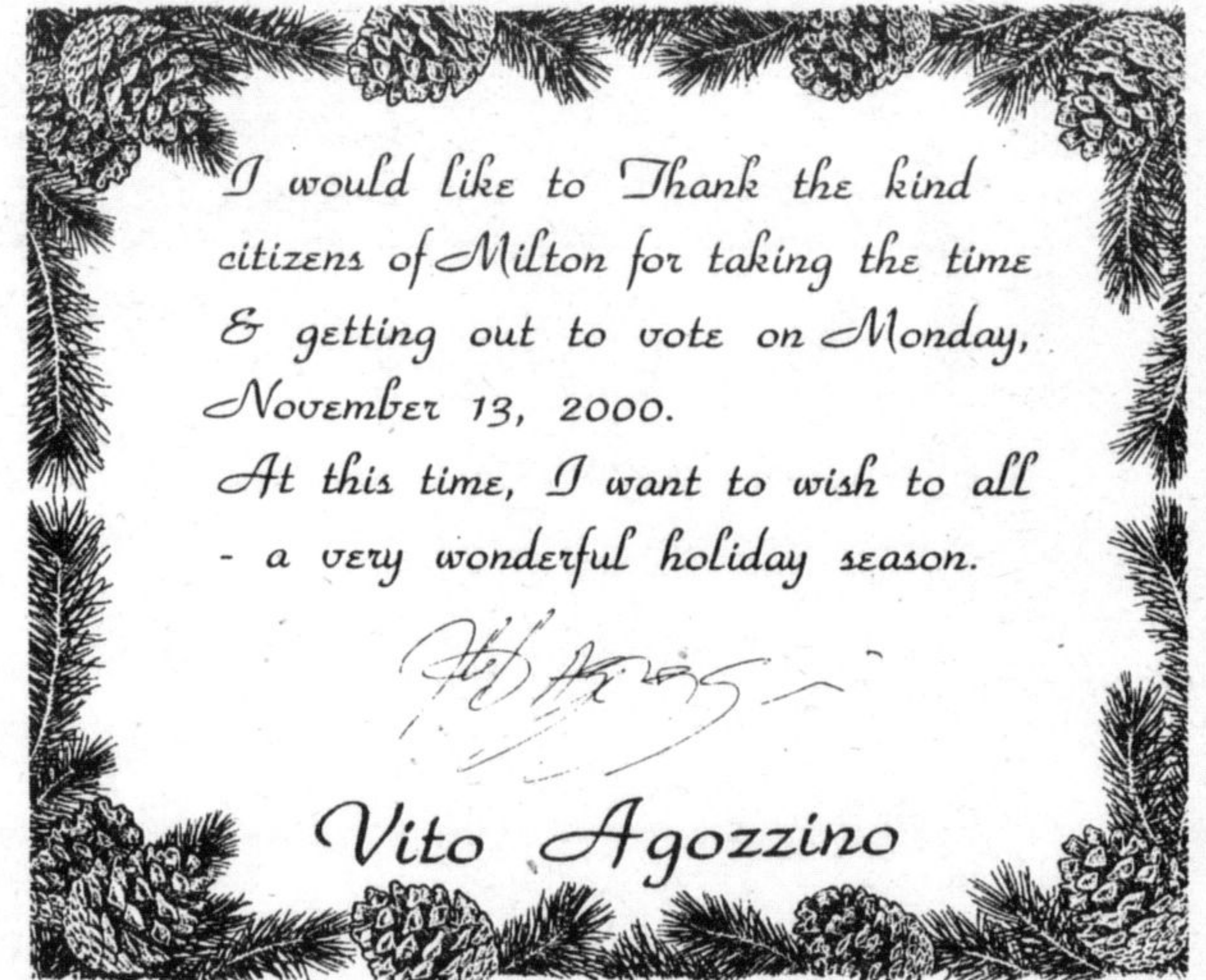
"We may lose not just the equality across the country, but also

the quality of programs," she warned.

In defense of his parties leadership, Mr. Reed said child tax benefits have been increased twice, the YOA amended several times, and health cuts are gradually being restored.

"In 1993 we set out on a journey together to restore a country that was on the verge of bankruptcy," he told the audience. "Now we're in a position where that has been turned into a success story. We're asking to continue what we began in 1993."

But Ms Dolling accused the Liberals of failing its mandate. "The Liberals abandoned their role to lead," she said. "The NDP would take back that role."



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