

# Trustee says he's not ready to resign just yet

*Ellis says a couple of things must happen before he will officially resign from position*

A Halton District School Board trustee has indicated he won't formally resign until at least the middle of next month.

Michael Ellis verbally announced his intention to vacate his seat as Ward 1 trustee for Burlington earlier this month, a day after board chair Ethel Gardiner made a public request for him to step down.

However, Mr. Ellis, in his second term on the board, told The Burlington Post (The Champion's sister newspaper) last Tuesday he won't formalize his resignation with a letter to Education Director Dusty Papke until he's ready.

Mr. Ellis has been in the eye of a board procedural and policy storm since late June of this year, when he called for an external investigation into certain practices of the board. He continues to allege the board illegally prolonged a meeting in May, at which time a new contract for Mr. Papke was approved, and that the minutes of the meeting didn't reflect the actual proceedings. On

another issue, he also alleges the board presented incomplete information to the public regarding future school closures.

Mr. Ellis' charges were refuted, though, by an external audit conducted by a consulting company. The report's findings, which cleared the board of any wrongdoing, were presented at the October 17 board meeting. Ms Gardiner then asked for Mr. Ellis' resignation.

Mr. Papke and Ms Gardiner say trustees can't get on with the business of filling any vacancy on the board until the elected official in question makes a resignation official.

"I read in the newspaper that he's resigning but he hasn't told me that. As far as I'm concerned, he's still a member of the board," Mr. Papke said.

Mr. Ellis said a couple of things must happen before he resigns officially.

"They still haven't forwarded me a copy of the investigative findings. I want to look that over. I've only heard about it (results) through the media. I'm obviously not thrilled with the find-

ings."

Mr. Papke said a report package was sent to Mr. Ellis' home immediately after the meeting.

Aside from wanting to see the report first before he acts, Mr. Ellis said he plans to attend a meeting with members of the Aldershot Community Council (ACC).

He said some constituents and ACC members have asked to meet with him about the report and to ask him more questions.

That meeting was tentatively set for tomorrow, but has been pushed back to November 14.

Mr. Ellis said he's "99 per cent" sure he'll submit a written letter of resignation soon after reading the report and meeting with the ACC.

Mr. Papke said the board can proceed in one of two ways to fill a trustee vacancy according to the Education Act. If the opening occurs in a non-municipal election year, which this is, it can appoint an individual within 60 days of the vacancy, or it can pass a resolution to hold a by-election in the ward.

Mr. Papke said that, technically, the act states a trustee automatically forfeits his or her seat if they miss three consecutive regularly-scheduled-board meetings. Mr. Ellis has missed two in a row with the next one on November 21.

"If he has made the decision to resign, then the sooner the board knows they can have someone in place to represent the area (ward) the better," Mr. Papke observed.

Despite about two years left in the current board's mandate, Ms Gardiner indicated the replacement of Mr. Ellis by board appointment might be preferable to a by-election.

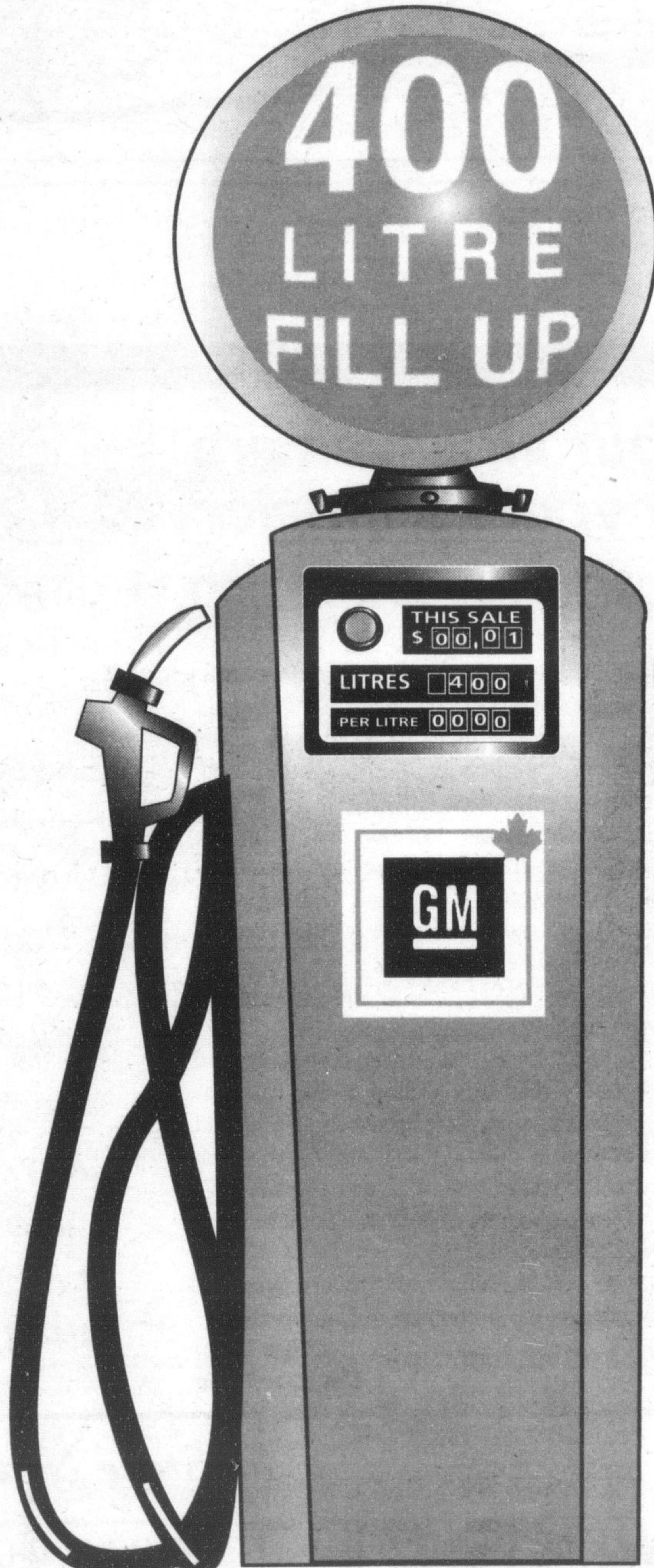
"Personally, I think a by-election is extremely costly, and I don't know how much interest is in the Aldershot area. Mike (Ellis) was acclaimed."

Mr. Papke said a by-election would cost anywhere from \$50,000 to \$70,000 and that the school board would foot the entire bill.

Meanwhile, the investigation prompted by Mr. Ellis' allegations will cost the board in excess of \$50,000.

There have been three trustees replaced on the Halton public school board in the last three years. Burlington's David Bird and Oakville's Debbie Marklew left in 2000, weeks before the municipal elections, to live outside the region and were replaced with appointees Dan Drohan and Kelly Amos.


Oakville's Mary Dempster resigned in 1998 and was replaced in a by-election by Lynn Roberts.



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