



COMMENT



THE CANADIAN CHAMPION

Box 248, 191 Main St. E.,
Milton, Ont. L9T 4N9

(905) 878-2341

Editorial Fax: 905-878-4943

Advertising Fax: 905-876-2364

Classified: 905-875-3300

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Ian Oliver *Publisher*

Neil Oliver *Associate Publisher*

Jill Davis *Editor-in-Chief*

Karen Smith *Editor*

Wendy McNab *Advertising Manager*

Charlene Hall *Circulation Manager*

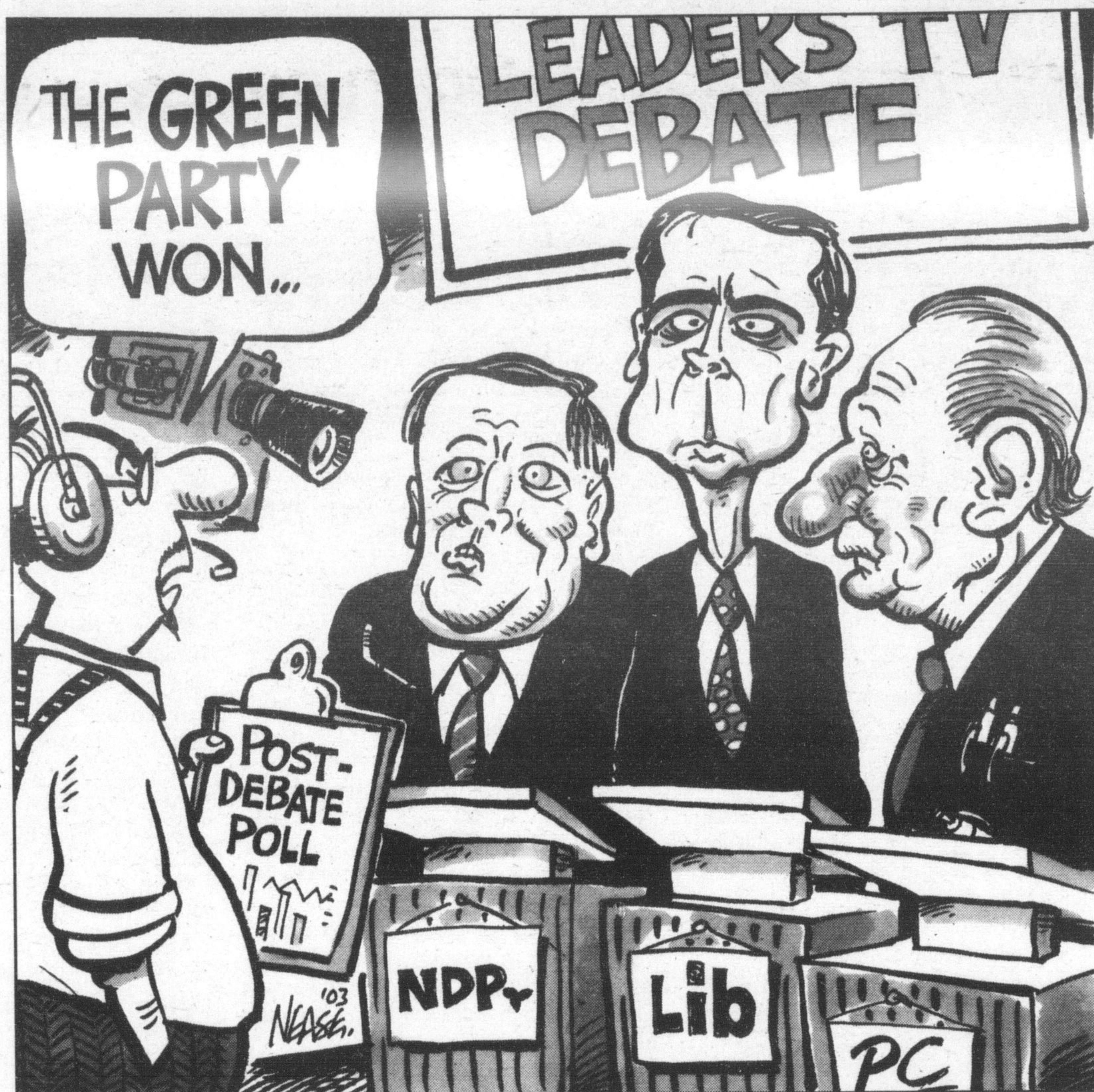
Teri Casas *Office Manager*

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Should they stay or go?

Stay the course or make way for change? That's the question voters will ask themselves as they head to the polls Thursday. For the undecided, Wednesday's leadership debate was of little aid. And viewers who tuned in with a favourite found no substantive reason to change their minds.

Yet the Liberal vow of positive change is clearly resonating with Ontario voters, who are known for their occasional housecleaning. The Tories — swept into power after the disastrous NDP term under Bob Rae — this time may be swept out. But in favour of what?

Improved health care and education are easy answers, yet no matter how hard we wish, there's no easy solution for either. Simply throwing more money at them is unsustainable.

Eves has promised to keep cutting taxes and supporting business while McGuinty says he will hold the line on taxes, scrapping currently-promised cuts and using the "saved" revenue to pay for beefed-up programs and services. He seems almost dismissive of business, unaware, perhaps, that it's the leading driver of the provincial economy.

Both policies, however, are based on an assumption of revenue that the Fraser Institute has annihilated. It estimates the current government is facing a \$4.5-billion deficit, one the Liberals would inherit should they win at the polls. If true, that deficit would dramatically impact promised Liberal reforms. Perhaps more adept in boosting programs than cutting them, McGuinty has been unable to explain how his policies would change to adapt to that reality. That's a crucial piece of information for voters prior to the election.

Voters must carefully consider the challenges facing this province and decide which party, and which leader, can best navigate the obstacles facing us.

A minority Eves government with a stronger and vocal opposition seems best suited to do the job. That will remind the government that, along with strong leadership and solid fiscal policy, voters want to be consulted, heard and respected. It means they want forward movement on the environment, assurances in health and education and say in their future.

It's not the knockout blow some hope for, perhaps, but it should get the job done.

OUR READERS WRITE

Reader says environment has not been enough of an issue in election campaign

Dear Editor:

Where has the environment gone from the political agenda?

Do people not remember Walkerton, the Keele Valley Landfill, the reason for nutrient management regulations and a lack of funding to conservation authorities?

We lack the knowledge needed to consistently make environmentally-informed decisions, according to 71 per cent of the Ontarians who responded to a poll conducted for Environmental Education Ontario.

'Greening the Way Ontario Learns: A Public Strategic Plan for Environmental and Sustainability Education in Ontario' unites efforts of people from all sectors who recognize the need to advance province-wide environmental literacy (available on-line in October at www.eeon.org). It represents three years of consultation to produce a vision of how we can achieve a healthy, ecological and sustainable future.

We all need to ask the following questions to our election candi-

dates:

- Do you agree that a healthy society and a healthy economy depend on a healthy environment?
- Do you favour promoting — through our education, government and businesses — the education we all need to sustain a healthy environment?

We cordially invite you to join us in this effort to make possible environmentally-sound decision making by Ontarians.

Tunde Otto-Harris
Limehouse

E-mail all your letters to the editor to miltomed@haltontsearch.com.

By not voting, you let someone else speak for you

I saw a television advertisement the other day that I thought was effective in emphasizing the importance of exercising the bread and butter of democracy — the right to vote.

It showed people dining in a restaurant. Patrons at one table ordered meals for patrons they didn't know at another table.

Members of the party (no pun intended) that had their dinner ordered for them were left speechless and the clear message was, if you don't vote, someone else speaks for you.

The right to choose government is the thing our soldiers, sailors and airmen fought for — and some of those who survived still live in our community today.

Yet many people take voting for granted. Too many, in fact.

For instance, in the last municipal election in 2000, only a little more than 38 per cent of

Miltonians who were eligible to vote cast a ballot.

And it wasn't a fluke. In the 1997 and 1994 municipal elections, the voter turnout was about 39 per cent. In 1991 and 1988, it was 31 per cent.

The mid-1980s municipal election recorded the worst voter turnout since at least the late 1970s at about 29 per cent.

That dreaded 1985 election represented the low point of a gradual voter decline from 1978 when 44 per cent of Miltonians cast a ballot.

Sadly, those figures are apparently about the same in other municipalities.

Trying to determine why voter turnout is so low is difficult. There are probably a variety of reasons from citizens simply not caring who's in power to people thinking their vote won't make a difference.

Believe it or not, there are some people out



From the
editor's desk

with **KAREN SMITH**

there who don't even know provincial and municipal election campaigns are going on right now.

I know this because I came across it when I had a job enumerating door-to-door for a federal election years ago.

One man answered the door and I told him I was there to make sure he was on the voters' list

for the election.

"What election?" he responded.

I was aghast.

I thought, you'd have to be living in a hole not to know an election for the Government of Canada was about to take place.

And this person clearly hadn't just landed from overseas.

As long as you're mentally and physically able, there's really no excuse for not voting. There are lots of ways — like advance polls — to cast a ballot even if you will be out of the country on election night.

Wouldn't it be great if we could get at least 50 per cent of Milton residents to vote October 2 and November 10?

You've probably heard it before, but it's a legitimate argument that if you don't vote, you forfeit your right to complain about government later.