

# Comment

## Chilling election ahead

For the second time in the past 30 years, Canadians will have to tramp through snow on election day January 23 after the fall last week of Prime Minister Paul Martin's Liberal government.

Will a winter election campaign affect the average voter more so than a spring or fall campaign? We think not. We can't use the weather as an excuse for voter apathy. It's present in all seasons.

Apart from the Christmas/New Year's holiday week, which we expect will be relatively quiet on the political front as candidates avoid disturbing voters in the middle of festivities, a winter campaign shouldn't be unlike any other. Voters will be expected to listen to the candidates and their leaders, question them on their policies and plans, ask intelligent questions and make an informed opinion before casting a ballot. Well, that's what we hope will happen.

While each election is crucial to the future of the country, this one could potentially be a turning point in the nation's history should the Conservatives unseat the Liberals in what will undoubtedly be a nasty campaign with the shadow of the Gomery report looming in the background.

Ignoring the Bloc, each of the main parties is faced with decided challenges.

**Liberals:** Can they overcome the sponsorship scandal that showed the Grits squandered millions in taxpayers' money and were so steeped in cronyism and kick-backs that suddenly separatism looked good again to many Quebecers? Can Martin convince the electorate to give him and the party another chance?

**Conservatives:** Leader Stephen Harper is again the key and must be able to convince voters in seat-rich Ontario that he offers a reasonable alternative. He failed miserably last time. Can he make himself appealing to Ontarians in the next eight weeks? He has some tough roads ahead.

**NDP:** Rather than just being the 'other guy', can Jack Layton and his party offer something palpable to voters that neither the Grits nor the Tories can? In Layton's favour is the fact students are in class and he can make his pitch to a captive young audience. The youth vote traditionally leans a little more left than right.

Over the coming weeks, The Champion will cover the candidates and we encourage our readers to get involved.



## Our Readers Write

### Still way too many teenagers lighting up

Dear Editor:

According to the recently-released 2005 Ontario Student Drug Use Survey, 14 per cent of youth smoke in Ontario.

Although that number has decreased over the years, there are still too many young people addicted to cigarettes.

I was very pleased to read the article, 'Anti-tobacco advocate delivers hard-hitting message' by Melanie Hennessey November 18. Educating youth about tobacco and the industry is critical to

allow them to make informed decisions. We commend the school boards for welcoming Georgina Lovell into 11 Halton schools and we thank The Champion for publishing the article.

Smoking is often glamorized in the media and Ms Lovell encourages students across the region to think critically about what they see and hear.

**Cathy Thompson**  
Centre for Addiction and Mental Health

### We need sustainable development action now

Dear Editor:

Recently I asked Halton regional councillors how, as our representatives, they intend to deal with Environmental Commissioner Gordon Miller's latest report where he clearly articulates that our unchecked growth problem, unless addressed and curbed, is aiming us toward certain disaster.

Specific questions asked:

1. To what degree can certain regions in Ontario, especially southern Ontario, sustain and assimilate this relatively unchecked growth?
2. Why aren't we talking about the ramifications?
3. Why do developers get free rein?
4. Why aren't the planning rules stronger to protect the environment?

In his annual report to Queens Park, Commissioner Miller stated that with our flawed planning sys-

tem we're continuously endangering Ontario's wildlife, forests and water, and that because of this we are forever posing an emergent threat to our own health and living standards, too.

Within his tabled report, Mr. Miller pointed out that developers appear to always get free rein over environmental rules that were meant to safeguard our sustainability. Who's driving our future?

For instance, within the Greater Toronto Area, Mr. Miller pointed out that we have difficulty growing enough food and finding adequate energy just to meet the needs of today's four million citizens, so how are we possibly ever going to cope with the government's projected eight million people slated for the future?

To me, it's like asking for more people to join us on the Titanic just after she hit the iceberg. Who gets the short-term benefit and who gets

the long-term pain? Are we that foolish?

Mr. Miller's concise observations and grounded concern add much urgency to our ever-loudening wake-up call. He expertly acknowledges we've a serious and growing shortage of farmland, doctors, hospitals, electricity and an increasing scarcity of oil and gas supplies.

With all this, it appears we've a major disaster looming that needs focused attention, right now... not later. If there ever was a time for implementing sustainable development initiatives, it's truly now.

With no reply received yet, I can only suggest that if our regional council can't or won't address this important issue on our behalf, then 'unbridled growth' needs to be an issue for us, the voters.

**Bob Beyette**  
Campbellville

Have your say on a local issue with a letter to the editor.

## The Canadian Champion

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by Steve Nease

