

Duignan defends NDP's \$4 billion spending cutbacks

By ROB KELLY
The Champion

The NDP ship of state is sinking in disarray, torpedoed by debt, contends Halton North Liberal MPP Barbara Sullivan. But Halton North MPP Noel Duignan believes it is Ms Sullivan and her colleagues who are all wet.

The two provincial politicians representing varying areas of Milton

exchanged broadsides in separate interviews following last week's release of the NDP economic package involving \$4 billion in spending cutbacks. Without the austerity measures, Queen's Park faced the spectre of a \$17 billion annual deficit, treasurer Floyd Laughren warned.

Ms Sullivan, the Liberal health critic, said the government's brief meant "we are left wondering what

areas of medicare are going to be left the way people know it."

Slamming what she called "the chaos and disarray in the Ministry of Health," Ms Sullivan noted that, for example, "it looks as if the Drug Care Plan is going to be dismantled for seniors and poor people."

"This government has failed miserably. The basic problem is that this government does not know what it's doing. I sincerely believe that."

"Do the Liberals?" shot back Mr. Duignan.

Drug Plan cutbacks will only be targeted at relatively affluent seniors, making somewhere around \$55-60,000 a year, Mr. Duignan said. For them, "there will be a small service fee."

The Liberals "were in power for five years and they increased government spending from \$20 billion to \$40 billion," Mr. Duignan as-

serted. "And they were the good times. Well, the good times are not here anymore."

"We have to preserve our society as we know it. We have to get our debt under control," Mr. Duignan said. "The deficit has reached a proportion (of revenues) where it's getting out of control."

Ms Sullivan charged that major government programs will swim in red ink or are fatally flawed concepts. The \$1.1 billion JobsOntario employment fund is "not working" and the number of jobs created so far "is minimal in comparison to the promises made and the funding provided."

So far the NDP has committed more than \$1 billion to a program that has served up roughly 7-8,000 jobs, when one compares the 18,000 positions funded with plans to eliminate 11,000 civil service jobs, Ms Sullivan said.

An even greater extravagance is the \$2.3 billion being funnelled into building 20,000 subsidized housing units, which will operate at a loss and saddle Ontario with \$2 billion more in debt, Ms Sullivan said.

"The Liberals are just playing silly games," Mr. Duignan chastised. JobsOntario has taken 17,000 people off welfare, he said, and "put them back in the workforce. Many of the civil service positions may be cut by attrition, he added, not laying people off."

The \$2.3 billion in housing is not government financed directly, since start-up capital for the building comes from the private sector, with loans paid back through market rents and mortgages as well as government subsidized ones, Mr. Duignan added.

"The question I have for the Liberals is, are they expecting the taxpayers to pick up the tab if we add \$17 billion to the deficit?" Mr. Duignan asked. "Are they saying the public should foot the bill?"

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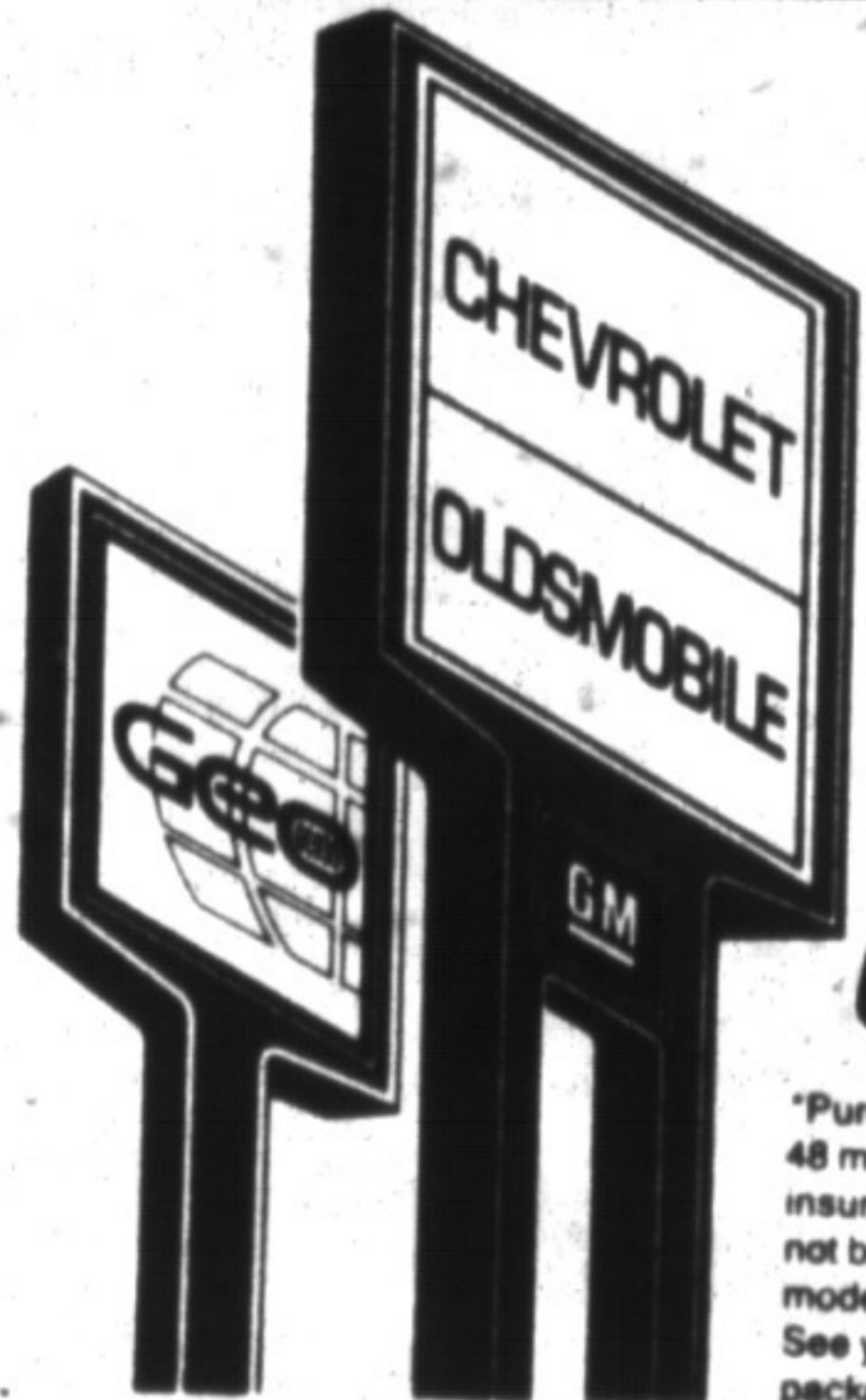
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Reform set to reduce deficit

• from CANADIANS on page 5 and policy objectives altogether.

This means federal funding would not be given to cultural and linguistic groups, leaving the responsibility to individuals, private associations, and if necessary, lower levels of government.

It would also mean an end to the Department of Multiculturalism. However, anti-racism programs would still continue. They would be re-directed under the Justice Department, saving \$21.5 million.

The Official Languages Policy would be replaced by territorial bilingualism for a savings of \$400 million, and foreign aid cutbacks would save \$250 million annually.

• Reducing non-salary objects of expenditure.

After reducing the number of ministries and policy objectives, Reformers then propose an across-the-board cut in non-salary standard expenditures for all federal departments and agencies.

The expenditures include non-salary overheads and contracted services such as professional and special services, rentals, materials, supplies, construction, and acquisition of land for a \$1.8 million savings.

But before the Reformers can apply the plan, the party must get elected — something Mr. Somersall said he doesn't see as too far out of reach.

"The average Canadian is really sitting up and paying attention to what the Reform Party has to say because we are addressing concerns of the average Canadian," he said.