



OPINION

THE CANADIAN CHAMPION

Box 248, 191 Main St. E.,
Milton, Ont. L9T 4N9
(905) 878-2341
1-800-668-7794
Fax: 878-4943
Classified: 875-3300

Ian Oliver *Publisher*
Neil Oliver *General Manager*
Rob Kelly *Editor*
Karen Huisman *Circulation Manager*
Teri Casas *Office Manager*
Mark Dills *Production Manager*
Ted Lindsay *Retail Sales Manager*

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We'll be watching Monday night

Monday our town council will be voting on the various options presented to them by town staff regarding the widening of Martin Street.

The public meetings that have been held and the 2,400 signatures on a petition to maintain the street's present character clearly indicate the popular choice. Leave the road at its current width, put in new sewers, curbs and sidewalks and give it a new surface.

Why our continued concern, then? Are we worried about being ambushed by some unknown proponents whose values, lifestyles, and opinions carry more weight than those of taxpayers? We can't be worried about the councillors, who all purport to represent us. They don't think they're smarter than the rest of us, do they?

The only group of substance which expressed a dissenting opinion to the public's was Milton's Downtown Business Improvement Area (DBIA), whose board of directors has since discovered, as did our town council and staff, that their consent to the defoliation plan was unpopular with many of their members. Tut! Tut!

So who are we fighting? Personally I believe it's the bulldozer of bureaucracy which, like a colony of worker ants, appears to have a life of its own. Each department has its own genetic code programming it to perform a designated function when stimulated by the presence of funding (tax money).

Like a viral infection, they invade the productive cells of taxpayers, producing pandemic bylaws, guidelines, ministerial acts, regulations and other questionable plans (Destiny Milton), necessary for their own survival, while strangling the lifeblood of their unwilling hosts.

Martin Street is just one of a multitude of

View Point

with PATRICK KELLY



instances in which taxpayer money is being misappropriated for unpopular projects or causes — and the vaccine of a vote every few years has lost its potency.

Premier Bob Rae's bilingual highway signs, the GST, immigration department ineptitudes, our overpriced regional dump, and an education system that ignores the taxpayers' report card are but a few mutations of the same bug pervading our dysfunctional governments.

To paraphrase George Bernard Shaw, we know what you are, we're just haggling over the price.

So what's the answer? How about forgetting the politicians and electing the department heads? Let's put accountability where it really counts.

Would the bureaucrats running our courts, immigration department, education system, parole boards or tax departments be a little more responsive to the voters if their jobs were on the line? Have the political middlemen become redundant? Department heads at least have to show some qualifications.

That's something to think about next Monday when council deliberates, pontificates and obfuscates regarding the minor skirmish that is Martin Street. Like Marshall Foch, the taxpayer is surrounded. Sound the charge, fellow citizens, it's time to counterattack.

Saying goodbye to another summer vacation

It is September 4 as I write this column, looking out onto the tranquil lake for the last time this summer. Tomorrow I am heading back to town — my other reality — with kids, cats and hamster. (Hubby can get back there on his own steam.)

As I sit in my office, amazed that the summer has flown by so quickly, I am asking myself questions.

Was my final swim of the season really on August 27, or will a hot day in September lure me one more time into the lake? I always feel badly that I can never, until much later, determine when that final dip happened. While I can without a doubt proclaim in spring: "This is my first dip (brrr) of the year," I can never for a certainty declare: "This is my last swim."

Still on the beach front: Will the 50-horsepower boat motor fine-tune itself during its winter months of rest and solitude? Or will hubby be fiddling with it on his weekend jaunts to the cottage? Then again, maybe he will be preoccupied with fixing the malfunctioning 4.5-horsepower motor from our small aluminum boat.

The cedar siding on our new second storey is only boards away from completion. What I want to know is, will we finish the staining before the snow flies? And, will hubby, who's afraid of heights, talk little old me, equally leery of heights, into climbing to the top of the



On the Homefront

with ESTHER CALDWELL

10-foot ladder that stands on top of the 10-foot scaffolding (hubby's latest acquisition), to put the finishing staining touches to the fascia? (The 6 foot 4 inch teenager begs off heights, claiming he has a bad back. Too much time on the computer, I suppose.)

Summer has come and gone and it is obvious that the topsoil in our backyard will not see green this year. I suggested to hubby that we plant wildflowers instead of grass, but he said we must grow grass over the septic tank and tile bed. Who told him that?

Will we find a cute little stove for our cottage bedroom before the onset of winter? Hubby must have read my thoughts about that ugliest stove in the world that was slated for our master suite. He pawned it off this morning on his stepfather, who hauled it away in our little trailer.

How many of hubby's relatives will reappear



The under-represented majority

"Enough is Enough," boldly declares a tattered old handbill. "Students act now to end this trend towards the destruction of your education ... Join a loud rally to fight the hike."

Pretty dramatic stuff.

If taxpayers were only half this passionate every time our taxes went up, we'd probably find more in our wallets at the end of each month.

But it's not that easy.

The beneficiaries of government spending have a tremendous incentive to organize themselves and present their cases emphatically. The associated cost, which is diffused across the large tax base, is nominal compared to the concentrated benefit bestowed upon them by government.

The student rally protesting a tuition hike is case in point. Groups like the Canadian Federation of Students (CFS), which organize student rallies, make no apology for demanding increased government spending. The CFS advocates increased grants for students and universities, the elimination of student tuition and increased taxes to pay for it all.

They are well funded and well organized. And when it comes time to review post-secondary education policy, take a guess who's in

Let's Talk Taxes



with PAUL PAGNUELO

position to bend the ear of government.

Research done in the U.S. by Yale University Professor James Payne reveals the degree to which groups like the CFS and like minded advocates are dominating the public policy process.

Professor Payne examined public hearings in Washington, D.C. surrounding 14 bills which involved government spending. Of the 1,060 witnesses who made submissions, 1,014 supported increased spending. Of these 1,014, 47 per cent were federal administrators, 33 per cent represented public interest groups, 10 per cent were state and local officials and 6 per cent were legislators within Congress — you get the picture.

What about the other side of the ledger? Of the remaining 48 submissions, 39 were neutral and a mere 7 were opposed to more government spending. In summary, Professor Payne's study concluded the spending interests out-represented the non-spending interests by a ratio of 145 to one. (It's unlikely the ratio would vary markedly if a similar study were conducted in Canada.)

The imbalance in representation between those demanding more spending and those demanding less spending is one reason why our governments collectively borrow more than \$1,500 every second. It is also a reason why our taxes keep going up.

Legislated limits mandating balanced budgets, spending and tax caps would likely reverse the trend, as could votes that would allow the "common interest" to override the "special interest".

But these solutions must be grounded in a deeper understanding that government is not something mythical. For every benefit bestowed to someone by government, someone else must pay.

Governments have no money of their own.

In our rush to placate the often well-intentioned and well-represented spending interests, we have failed to ask the equally important question: Who pays?

It's a question that needs to be put forcefully to the CFS and the hundreds of other like-minded groups.

Let's hope Professor Payne's research is a wake-up call for taxpayers.