

Wide-ranging reaction to budget

By **BRAD REAUME**
The Champion

Ontario's 1996 budget provoked different a gamut of reactions from various people and businesses.

The Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA) was generally pleased, pointing to \$15 million for research, an exemption on sales tax for farm building materials and a rural telecommunications program.

"The efforts of the OFA have been recognized in the Ontario budget with the announcement of initiatives for research, market development and telecommunications," said Tony Morris, OFA president.

The Ontario Public School Boards' Association was less enthusiastic saying the tax cut announced in last week's budget "should not come at the expense of students."

Nancy Dunlop, association vice-president, used the budget announcement to complain provincial cutbacks "are affecting classroom education.

"By law and because they are responsible to taxpayers, Ontario's public school boards have always balanced their budget. They don't think it's fair that the provincial government is dumping its debt problem on local communities at the expense of students," Ms Dunlop said.

Trevor Ambridge, president of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Ontario, called income and payroll tax cuts "an important first step towards dealing with Ontario's high taxation levels."

Calling Ontario "a high tax jurisdiction" Mr. Ambridge particularly welcomed the elimination of the Employer Health Tax on the first \$400,000 of annual payroll, saying such taxes hurt small business. He encouraged continuing discussion to harmonize provincial sales tax with the federal Goods and Services Tax (GST).

Representatives of home builders were predictably pleased with the budget. Relief from the Land Transfer Tax, coupled with increases in disposable income and low interest rates, should kick start the housing market, said Laverne Brubacher, president of the Ontario Home Builders' Association.

"This will allow first-time buyers to increase their purchasing power by almost \$2,000," said Ms. Brubacher, who praised the overall budget. "For more than five years now we have been seeking lower taxes and reduced deficits. This is good news for home builders and buyers, and it's good news for the whole economy."

However, the Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL) was not happy, saying 90 per cent of tax filers in Ontario who earn less than \$50,000 will get nothing from the

budget, because their tax break will be eaten by user fees.

The OFL claims the average taxpayer, depending upon family circumstances, will lose between \$300 and \$500.

"A tax break for the rich makes no sense," said OFL president Gord Wilson. "With the changes... over 50 per cent of the tax cut will go to the top 10 per cent of tax filers."

Video on pesticide out

• from VIDEO on page 16

"Pesticide Safety and the Rural Home and Garden" is available for loan at the local agriculture office in Georgetown (873-9930). The video can also be purchased from the OFWN in Trenton (519) 461-1725.

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