



COMMENT

THE CANADIAN CHAMPION

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

Ian Oliver *Publisher*
Neil Oliver *Associate Publisher*
Rob Kelly *Editor*
Karen Huisman *Circulation Manager*
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A 'Golden' opportunity?

Now that the Who Does What panel chaired by former Toronto mayor David Crombie has released its proposals for a municipal government makeover, the reaction has been strangely muted.

Maybe that's because the proposals are fairly vague. The fate of area municipalities — such as Milton, Oakville, Burlington and Halton Hills — the four which make up Halton, isn't really explored. Instead there is talk of amalgamating unidentified smaller centres across Ontario into bigger ones.

Regional government in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) is recommended for the scrap heap, yet Halton Chair Joyce Savoline, who met just a week ago with Premier Mike Harris, certainly doesn't seem worried. She could be whistling in a graveyard but she is downplaying the Crombie report, and stressing that she believes Halton in its present incarnation will be unscathed.

In a development that should give her pause, however, is it recommended Toronto evolve into one so-called mega-city, with an oversight board linked to surrounding GTA centres that would control highway construction, transit, similar large-scale facilities and policing.

That is dangerously reminiscent of scenarios from the late and unlamented Golden report on re-jigging the GTA. Anne Golden had proposed a governing body that was dangerously Toronto-centric, from the suburban perspective, when it came to political power.

This new scheme could shape up the same way.

If Toronto becomes one major entity and the suburbs — what were Halton, Peel, Durham and York regions — become much smaller and fractured entities, Toronto will call the tune on all the major projects.

When it comes to building new highways, shoreline redevelopment, shifting property tax assessment, providing new growth-related services such as water for Milton, who will be first? Not the suburbs, based on political clout, even if Burlington amalgamates with Oakville and Halton Hills hitches up to Milton. Toronto will outweigh them all, by far.

So what is worrisome about the Crombie recommendations is the same thing that was disconcerting about the Golden ones, despite the fact Mr. Crombie isn't backing the same level of power and taxation consolidation as Ms Golden was.

The fact is, when the big get bigger and the small get smaller, which is what will happen if Halton is essentially dissolved and Toronto expanded, the former gather political power at the expense of the latter.

We need to restructure government to lessen duplication and spending at all levels, and in many ways the Who Does What panel has approached this task in a rational manner.

But to ignore the potential fallout is to court disaster if you represent a suburban constituency. Safeguards must be built in to make this work, which will assure the hefty don't trample the diminutive.

It is a well-known fact that the provincial Tory government derives much strength from the suburbs — the so-called '905' area, so they will proceed cautiously. Perhaps that is the key to Ms Savoline's self-assurance. Something of a slim thread to cling to though, in a period that promises tumultuous change.

— Rob Kelly



Pages of the Past

One Year Ago

From the December 13, 1995 issue

• The cause of a fire that gutted Dad's Restaurant near Campbellville had yet to be determined, according to fire officials. Fire Chief Harold Person received word that an initial investigation by the Ontario Fire Marshal's Office was inconclusive. A complete report on the fire was expected in the upcoming weeks. No one was hurt in the November 21 blaze that ruined the restaurant.

• The Town of Milton was recognized for its anti-drug efforts with an award from the Ontario Drug Awareness Partnership. Much of the credit for Milton's recognition was owed to the citizen-based group Prevent. The group, consisting of representatives from area high schools, churches and special interest groups, helped organize workshops and information nights aimed at steering people away from drugs. The Partnership Award was a province-wide award.

20 Years Ago

From the December 15, 1976 issue

• In what was an emotionally-charged meeting of town council, Anne MacArthur gracefully bowed out from her position as mayor. Ms MacArthur had come up 145 votes short of Don Gordon in her bid to hold on to the mayor's position. She had been mayor for the previous three years

and expressed disappointment at the results of the civic election. "If I had to do it over again," said Ms MacArthur, "I would not change the position I took."

• Assumption High School in Burlington was announced as being the first Halton high school to be run by the separate school board. The new school, converted from an elementary school, was scheduled to open for the upcoming school year. A parents' council was being formed to develop dress and behaviour codes as well as decide on school colours.

• The Halton Region Conservation Authority (HRCA) rejected an invitation to join Halton Region in their newly proposed headquarters in Oakville. HRCA officials claimed the enormous cost of moving as well as their central location in Milton as reasons for declining the offer. Similar bids had been previously rejected by the Halton Board of Education, the Children's Aid Society, and the Halton Regional Police Force.

50 Years Ago

From the December 12, 1946 issue

• One of Milton's most highly respected and esteemed citizens, William Bradford Clements, passed away after a long life of service in the Milton area. Mr. Clements was a staple of business life in Milton, being the longtime manager of the Metropolitan Bank. He sat on many boards including that of the high school and the cemetery, and was a member of the St. Clair Masonic Lodge.

Pud

by Steve Nease

