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16 Centre Street, Essex, ON N8M 1N9
Tel.: (519) 776-4268 Fax: (519) 776-4014
Email: essexfreepress@on.aibn.com
Website: http://essexfreepress.reinvented.net
Publisher: Laurie A. Brett



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And they're off!

As of 5 p.m. last Friday, the 2006 municipal election was officially underway.

The final hours before the nomination deadline are often filled with tension as candidates and interested parties nervously await news of last-minute filings. In Essex, the lingering question on Friday was whether Deputy Mayor Percy Dufour would in fact

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file to run as councillor in Ward 3. By day's end, we had our answer. He has indeed joined the race.

Friday's source of tension in Windsor,

however, had less to do with last-minute filings and everything to do with the Town of Tecumseh's surprise announcement of a \$55-million deal with the Ice Track Corporation and the owners of Windsor Raceway. The agreement will result in the construction of a 6,500-seat arena, an additional ice pad, a museum and a restaurant, plus a new racetrack and slots facility on property located in the vicinity of Manning Road and Highway 401. The town's cost for nabbing this sweet deal? Just \$15 million.

It's fair to say that arena construction is going to be a hot election issue for the next 40 days, not only in Windsor and Tecumseh, but also in LaSalle and Essex. Although LaSalle has already broken ground for the Vollmer Recreation Complex, political hopefuls are divided about the \$28.8 million arena and community centre.

In Essex, the momentum that has been building for the past year may be in jeopardy. While the Kinsmen continue their arena fundraising efforts and the town examines design plans, critics are reportedly positioning themselves politically to sabotage the fledgling project.

Those with short memories or no memories at all need to be educated about last year's woes. After a crumbling northeast wall was repaired last November, consultants delivered a grim prognosis for the existing structure. Last year it had only five years. Time is swiftly whittling that prognosis down to four.

What reason can there be for attempting to scuttle a project that is clearly in the community's best interest and cannot be delayed? Spite and ignorance come immediately to mind.

Failure to act is the direct cause of Windsor's current arena woes. Windsor had multiple opportunities to move forward on the issue but didn't. Essex is as much at risk of being in Windsor's shoes in the near future if the right politicians with the right frame of mind on this issue are not elected. Be sure you know where each candidate stands on this issue before you cast your vote on November 13.



nespolon@gmail.com

It is apparent that Canada now has a Prime Minister with strong principles. Agree with Stephen Harper or not, the man stands up for what he believes in.

Harper has initiated a childcare program that is all-inclusive, rather than a new bureaucracy designed especially for the rich folks in big cities.

Harper believes that Canada's security rests with a strong military commitment with a human rights component. How can we send teachers and builders to Afghanistan if we can't guarantee their safety?

Harper prefers actions to words. Making his personal jet available to remove a hundred refugees from war-torn Lebanon was one such action. The consternation of Harper's security team must have been monumental!

For one considered in certain circles to be a strident conservative, Stephen Harper's stand in recognizing all those civilians who died or were displaced in the Israeli - Hezbollah conflict in southern Lebanon served notice last week at la Francophonie (a summit

of French-speaking nations) that Canada has a new generation of leadership. It took courage to refuse a resolution mentioning only



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bill gay

Arab suffering in those terrible events a short time ago, without mentioning Israeli deaths as well.

Harper's position likely did little to help his vote-getting potential with Canada's Lebanese citizens. And no balancing benefit will come to the PM from the Jewish community which has been solidly Liberal through many years.

Likewise, Harper's disdain for the Kyoto Accord also showed political realism. Some of the most

rabid environmentalists, who love the spirit of Kyoto, will tell you privately that Canada's goals were too ambitious. Once again, the Conservative leader's personal preference is to set attainable targets and see to it that Canada meets them.

It was another Conservative prime minister, in another time, who signed the most significant environmental treaty of its day. I am referring to Brian Mulroney and the landmark Acid Rain accord with the United States.

The only happier face in Tory Ottawa these days belongs to Foreign Affairs Minister Peter MacKay, now that ex-hockey favourite Tie Domi has displaced him in the Belinda Stronach saga. MacKay took it on the chin both personally and politically when the daughter of Magna Corporation founder Frank Stronach crossed over from the Conservatives to the Liberal front bench just hours before a key Liberal budget vote in May 2005.

Well, they say everyone gets a break once in a while.



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