

TAXES

Businesses protest at regional headquarters

BY LISA QUEEN
STAFF WRITER

York Region business owners facing huge property tax increases fear they have taken another step closer to bankruptcy.

After a protest on the front steps of York Region's headquarters Thursday, two dozen business people pleaded for councillors to find a way to reduce tax hikes of 100 to 1,000 per cent, a result of Ontario's new property tax system.

Councillors insisted they are scrambling to find solutions, hoping they will have some answers for next Thursday's finance committee meeting.

Markham Mayor Don Cousens, committee chairperson, said the region is pushing for a meeting with Treasurer Ernie Eves to discuss a number of options including:

- receiving a provincial grant or loan
- providing hard-hit businesses with a rebate
- withholding the region's \$250 million education tax to the province for six months, which would net the region about \$6 million in interest.

But business owners complain they are running out of time. For some, payment of the first instalment of their tax bills comes as early as Tuesday.

"It's not good enough to talk about this next week. Taxes are due in five days," said Aurora hardware store owner Mike Evans, following Thursday's meeting. Evans organized the protest and is trying to rally business owners across the region to fight the tax increases.

York-Mackenzie MPP Frank Klees has criticized mayors and councillors for failing to implement tools given to them by the province to soften the blow on small businesses. But York politicians complain the tools are useless.

"I keep hearing about the tools," Richmond Hill Mayor Bill Bell said. "I'm getting sick of the tools. I think when we opened the tool box in York Region, it was empty."



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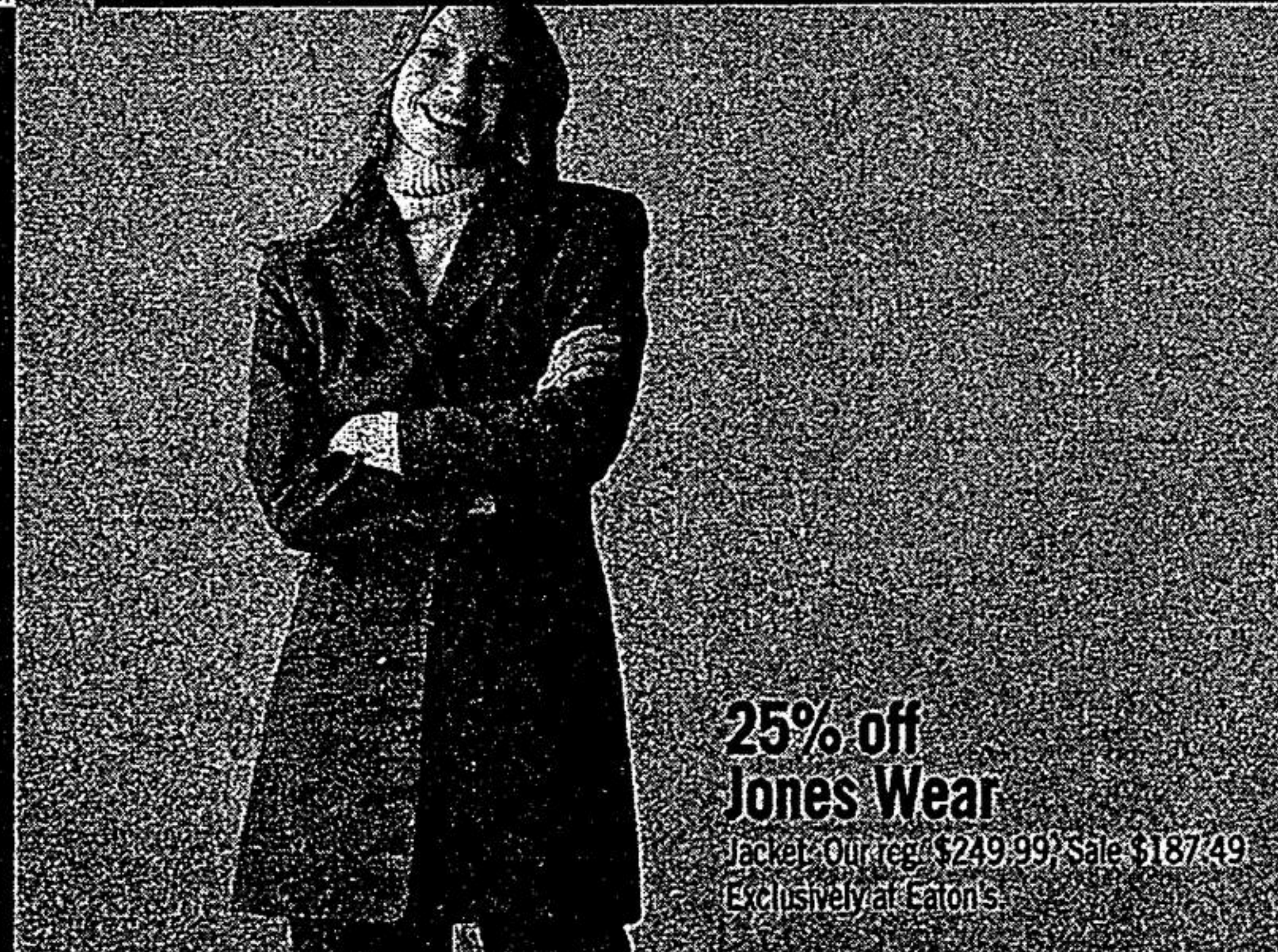
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We wish to draw your attention to the following in our current "Fabulous 2-week sale" flyer:

Page 11 - Envirofresh Bags, 43-6441-2
The Envirofresh bags are not available. Rainchecks will not be issued.

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