

HEALTH CARE: Role of hospice volunteering growing

MP attacks own party over gasoline prices

Government intervention a must: McTeague

BY MIKE ADLER
STAFF WRITER

Told it must act to ensure competition in the gasoline industry, the Chretien government is planning to do nothing, charges the Liberal MP who led his party's eight-month investigation into gasoline prices this year.

"I'm fighting my own government, my own front benches, because they don't want to do anything," said Liberal MP Dan McTeague.

McTeague said without independent gas dealers, now largely squeezed out by the major oil companies which dominate the market, consumers will be at the mercy of a few big suppliers — and nothing can prevent organized price increases.

The Liberal Committee on Gasoline Pricing in Canada, chaired by the MP for Pickering-Ajax-Uxbridge and Oak Ridges MP Bryon Wilfert, concluded the federal government must "take immediate steps" to stop the disappearance of independents from the industry.

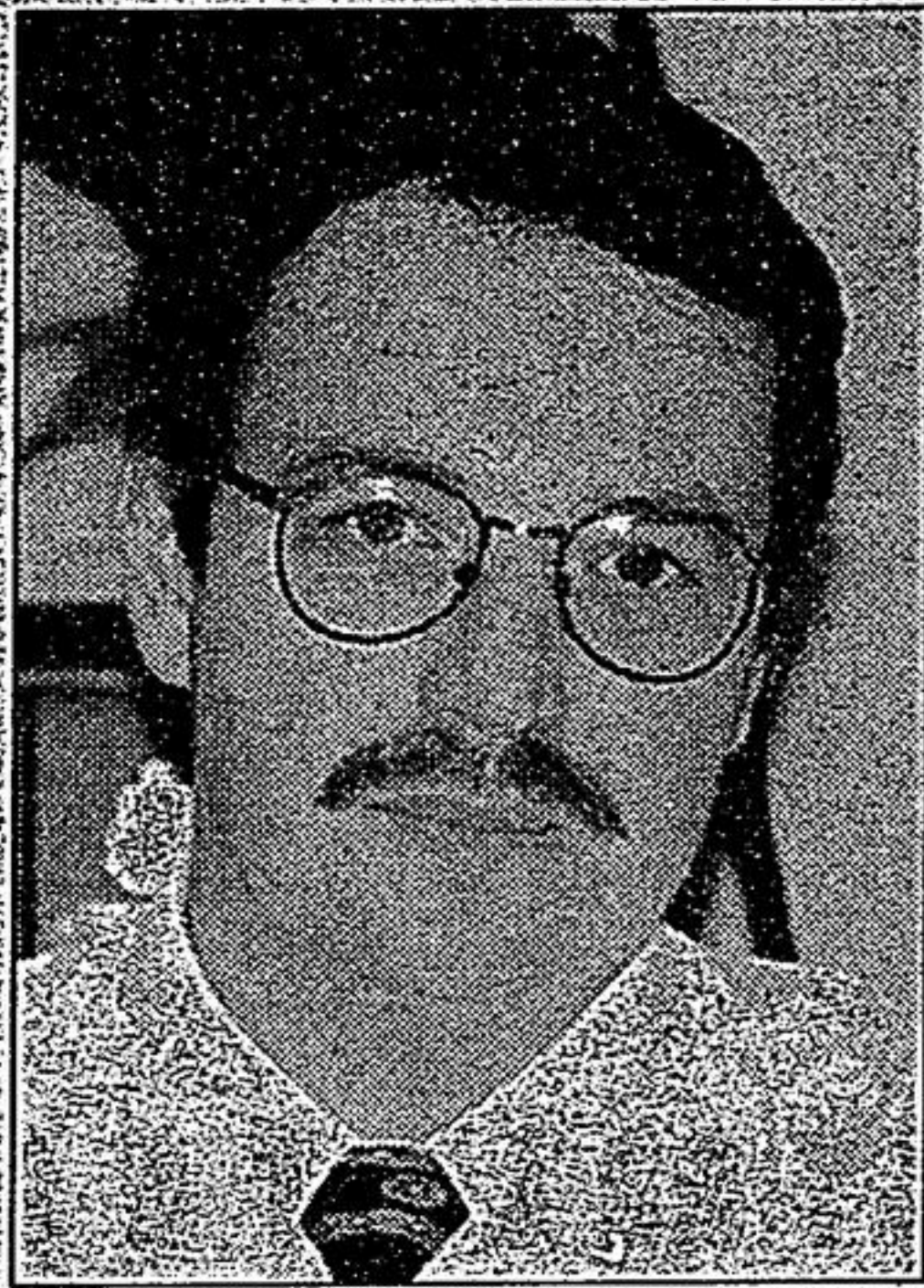
Most gas stations are owned by the same oil company that supply them with gas. The committee's 47 Liberal MPs recommended independent purchasers of gas get "a fair opportunity to make a profit on the sale, and that the Competition Act be changed to make it easier prove predatory pricing tactics are being used.

McTeague said he put these changes into a private member's bill, C-235, as an "end run" around his own government, including Industry Minister John Manley, who McTeague says does not want to challenge the large oil companies.

Needing support from fellow Liberal backbenchers and opposition MPs at a crucial vote on the bill next week, McTeague is angry that Markham MP Jim Jones, Conservative party industry critic, has spoken out against it.

Jones is supporting the status quo, and that means more independents in the area will close, argued McTeague.

"There are many people in his riding who have lost their shirts



DAN MCTEAGUE
Liberal MP

because of inaction."

Jones, however, said passing McTeague's bill would mean higher prices.

"Setting a minimum profit margin (for gasoline) would be legislating industry inefficiencies," he argued yesterday.

He added the bill would affect other businesses which supply products to their own subsidiaries.

"The marketplace is changing," said Jones, and there's nothing stopping independents from adding grocery stores or other money-making features, just like the company-run stations are doing.

Independents say gas pricing follows a cycle directed by the big companies — edging down to where turning a profit is impossible and then going up sharply.

The low stretches convince independents to shut down.

True competition, and the low prices, will disappear with them, McTeague warned.

"The public still thinks it's getting a good deal. It's not.

Anti-trust laws have prevented this situation in the U.S. for 50 years, and yet its market is the most competitive in the world, argued Manju Sekhri of the Independent Retail Gasoline Marketers' Association.

"Canada, in many ways, is very far behind."

BY JENNIFER BROWN
STAFF WRITER

When a loved one is living out the final days at home, an extended family of caregivers often includes nurses, home-care workers, friends and relatives.

But when the everyday pressures of making that person feel comfortable build to the breaking point, the primary caregiver often needs someone to lean on.

For some families, that's when a hospice worker can make a world of difference.

"A lot of people are still unaware of what a hospice does," Richmond Hill Hospice volunteer Mary Cottle said. "We try to provide a shoulder to cry on or an ear to listen.

And with more and more chronically ill and elderly people choosing to live out their last days at home, the role of a hospice volunteer is growing.

"It's really a wonderful thing. They spend time with the patient and become a companion to them, read to them, take them out," said Evert Van den Brink, whose wife Nollie died last year at the age of 47 as a result of complications related to a brain tumour.

Round-the-clock care was provided to Nollie when one of the Victorian Order of Nursing nurses assigned to the Van den Brinks felt Evert could use some extra help. She suggested he contact Hospice King.

Nollie had been diagnosed in early 1995 with a benign brain tumour. But because it was located so close to the brain stem, doctors were unable to remove all of the mass.

A year after the diagnosis, the tumour had grown back to half its original size. She then had complications involving meningitis and brain swelling.

"It had been just a nightmare," Evert recalled. "But the hospice said we could have as many hours as possible. It's wonderful because it gives the full-time caregiver a chance to get out and get some air."

And with the added support of hospice, Evert said, he was able to avoid what some were suggesting — putting Nollie in a nursing home.

"We decided it was not the place for her and decided to have her die at home. It's a wonderful gift you can give someone, to let

Someone to lean on when life gets tough



STAFF PHOTO/MIKE BARRETT

Mary Cottle, a volunteer with Hospice Richmond Hill.

them die at home."

Four different hospice volunteers visited with Nollie and Evert during her illness and, as needed, the hours were increased. What began as one afternoon per week, became 81 visits over the course of about a year.

"She needed so much care at the end. She was getting so frail, but she certainly enjoyed the companionship.

For Newmarket resident Bob Houghton, the time a hospice worker spent with his wife Marion was time cherished by all involved in her care.

What began as one afternoon per week, became 81 visits over the course of about a year.

"She came every Wednesday afternoon for two years," said Houghton, whose wife was diagnosed at age 55 with Lou Gehrig's disease in 1994. She died last year.

"After the first year, there were so many things I had to do, Brenda came and kept Marion company, which gave me a chance to run around doing errands. It was a good relationship — she was very upbeat. It was a positive experience for us. She talked and laughed with Marion and read books to her."

Time spent with people in need can also be also be fulfilling, said Mary Cottle, who has worked as a palliative care nurse at a Toronto hospital. When she decided to become a social worker specializing in gerontology, she began volunteering at Hospice Richmond Hill.

"I find it very rewarding. You talk to them and find out what they are concerned about, take them for walks, shop for them or read. Just become their friend," said Cottle.

Even though Cottle has a nursing background, most hospice volunteers do not have medical experience, but are trained by professionals to handle the emotional situations they may find themselves involved with.

"It can be stressful and you can get caught up in it, but it is rewarding.

Most hospice organizations provide a full range of services to assist families even after death.

This is Hospice Awareness Week. If you have any questions about services provided by hospice volunteers, contact any of the hospices listed.

• Hospice Richmond Hill, 10256 Yonge St. in Richmond Hill. Call (905) 884-6683.

• Markham Stouffville Hospice, (905) 472-5014.

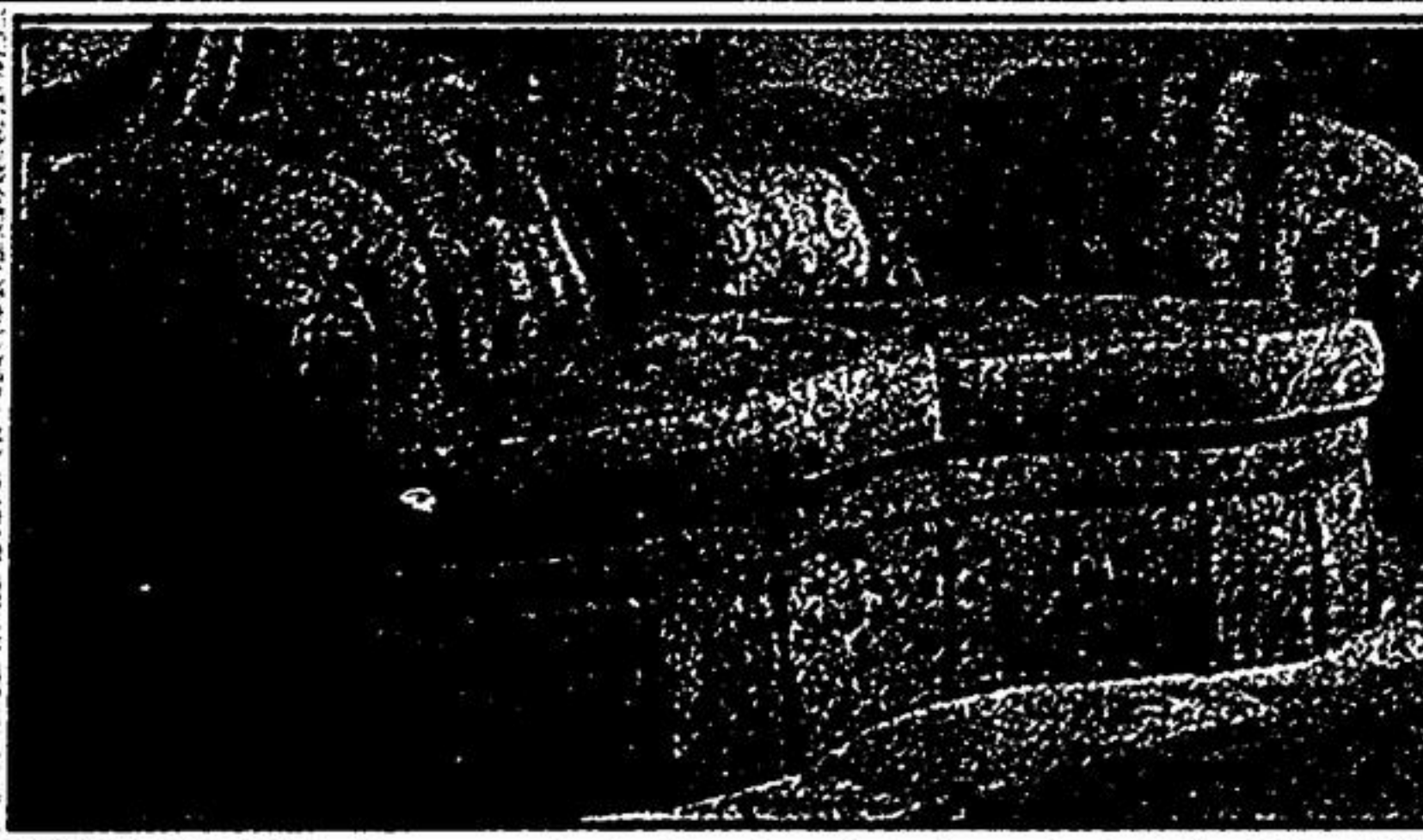
• Jewish Family and Child Services, North York, (416) 638-7800.

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