

Critics call Liberal tax relief an attempt to bribe voters

BY DAWN LIERSCH
Staff Writer

While the Liberals are lauding a new tax relief plan, right-wing parties are calling it an election ploy and a smokescreen to deflect attention from a scathing report on mismanagement of Human Resources funds.

"The Liberals are very savvy," said Kirk Sutherland, who's seeking the Alliance nomination in Markham. Everything they do is well calculated. They've tried to play the sweetheart deal with Canadian voters," he said.

"The mini-budget was a screen to mask the reality of the auditor general's report. Some of the media is spinning the budget faster than the actual reality of the report."

Sutherland was reacting to Finance Minister Paul Martin's mini-budget, which introduced sweeping tax cuts — totalling more than \$1,000 next year for average Canadians — just days before a federal election call was expected.

The timing also coincided with Auditor-General Denis Desautels' damning report on Human Resources spending.

Dorian Baxter, a Newmarket resident who is seeking the Canadian Alliance Party nomination in York North, said "It's probably one of the most appalling examples of trying to appease people. It's like bribery."

"This (the Human Resources debacle) is a terrible, terrible scandal and the Liberals are desperate and are trying to buy their way out of it."

Bob Yaciuk, an East Gwillimbury resident who is also seeking the Alliance

nomination in York North, suggested the move was an obvious attempt to wrest the tax-cutter image away from the Alliance.

"It's nice to see the Liberals don't mind stealing the good stuff... Now they're talking about tax breaks that just six months ago they said were impossible. It looks like the lust for power has overcome the impossibility of it all," he said, adding his party is promising deeper tax cuts, still.

"Keep in mind, this budget is not in place. It's like having a gun to taxpayers' heads saying, 'Look at all the good stuff you'll get if you vote for us.'"

York North Tory candidate Joe Wamback also questioned why such tax cuts weren't promised months ago and suggested voters will see the move as an election ploy.

"They've underestimated the average Canadian. We're not a bunch of fools. This could have been done six or eight months ago, not four days before an election call. Canadians can see right through it," he said.

While Wamback acknowledged Canadians will welcome tax relief, he said every party is promising tax cuts and the Liberals will have to do better to win public support.

He pointed out residents may lose all their tax savings just paying the skyrocketing price of gasoline.

"We need more in this country. We need more given to those who need it, not those who don't need it... There are people in this country who should not pay any taxes at all," he said, adding the Tories want to eliminate the capital gains

tax and the surtax and GST on gasoline.

"What is wrong with an immediate investment — not next year and not making it part of a political platform."

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— York North Tory candidate
Joe Wamback

But Oak Ridges Liberal MP Bryon Wilfert countered there's no better time to announce tax relief for Canadians.

"We said in February that it may take us three or four years (to provide tax relief). Why would we wait if we have this opportunity? I believe Canadians are going to respond favourably... In September, people were asking us when we were going to reduce taxes and give an eco-

nomonic statement," he said.

"The minister always makes an economic statement around this time anyway."

"It's important to be sending out the right signals to those who want to expand their businesses, as fast as possible... If people want to see something that isn't there, that's fine. I think we have to just stand back and see it for what it is."

Wiefert also pointed out the auditor general's report indicated the Liberals were working to rectify problems.

"Obviously there's work to do but we're on the right track. The issue is what did he say — you have a plan that's working. That was positive news," he said, adding Prime Minister Jean Chretien could have, in fact, called an election even before the report was released, if he believed it would impact election results.

Bob Callow, an Aurora resident who is seeking the Alliance nomination in Oak Ridges, called the mini-budget announcement "arrogant" and "crass opportunism."

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