

OPINION

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Editorial

Federal budget lacks true grit

Paul Martin's first budget as prime minister is exactly what the country expected after his Liberals got caught cheating Canadians.

And that speaks more to Canadians' low expectations than to his government's ability to meet them.

This budget is a sales pitch by a deeply damaged party hoping to convince the country it has learned from its wasteful ways.

Finance Minister Ralph Goodale presented a choir-boy budget, full of good, wholesome common sense and sheepish frugality — a "we won't waste your money" document that smacks of political strategy.

The winds of a spring election are definitely blowing.

Prudence. Accountability. Trust.

All terms the federal Liberals hope to convey by offering a nominal sum of cash — one of these days — to key areas they know Canadians would approve.

Health care gets \$665 million, cities will see \$7 billion over 10 years, farmers rank high with \$1-billion (doesn't hurt to keep Western farmers smiling now that Alberta resident and Conservative Party leader Steve Harper is ready to try and wrestle power from the Liberals), plus money for education, military efforts and security.

But anyone looking for a document that reflects the vision and leadership of a new prime minister will be sorely disappointed.

Tax relief? Significant help for cash-strapped municipalities? Anything that might make the Canadian economy more competitive?

Sorry, no dice.

Good luck, Grits. Funny, grit is what this budget lacks.

There was a time when we would have been impressed just to see a Liberal government pass a balanced budget.

But Mr. Martin did that as finance minister 10 years ago. Now our expectations are a little higher.

And this time, for the first time since shamed former prime minister Brian Mulroney decimated the federal Tories, the Liberals will have to offer Canadians a budget with substance if they want to win the election.

A lame, but safe budget just won't cut it this time, Mr. Martin.

The Liberals are clearly off their game and others are waiting to pick up the ball.



Off The Top

with Jim Mason

Guide to your new home town, neighbours

Employees of new home sales offices, those resembling light beer cases and others, may post this column free of charge.

I could also teach an evening credit course in Stouffville 101, if anyone's interested.

Consider it my bit of community service, not handed down by a provincial court justice. Just trying to help newcomers to our community, of which I was one 22 years ago.

A few tips from the oldtimer:

- You're new in town and can't figure out why everyone says hello to you at the grocery store and on Main Street. Is this Mayberry RFD or Jarvis and Gerrard? Go with the former.

- How do you pronounce the name of your new home town? Tip: there's no e in Whitchurch and fs are silent in Stouffville. Could be worse. This could be Mindemoya or Wabigoon.

- Someone recommends shopping at the sales barns? They mean the recently sold Stouffville Country Market, aka The Big Flea Market.

- You get directions to an address on "the 7th" but can't find the street in any GTA map book. Your director is old school, from the day when all major north-south roads were numbered concessions. They mean McCowan Road. Tip: From the Ninth Line heading west, count down by one at each road.

- Where is the Whitchurch in Whitchurch-Stouffville, you ask? Everywhere but Stouffville. This town was amalgamated in the early 1970s, marrying rural Whitchurch Township, which used to stretch over to Yonge Street, with urban Stouffville.

- If Stouffville is land-locked, why do local minor hockey teams parade around the province with the nickname Clippers and a large sailing ship on their jerseys, you ask? I'd like to tell you that Lake Ontario once extended to Main Street or the Stouffville Creek was once the width of the St. Lawrence River, but I can't.

- How can a town with fewer than 25,000 residents have two grocery stores open 24/7 when larger communities go without? Don't ask, but be thankful when you run out of guacamole at 4 a.m.

Jim Mason is editor of the Sun-Tribune.

Letters to the Editor

The Stouffville Sun-Tribune welcomes your letters.

All submissions must be less than 400 words and must include a daytime telephone number, name and address. The Stouffville Sun-Tribune reserves the right to publish or not publish and to edit for clarity and space.

Write: Letters to the Editor, 34 Civic Ave., P.O. Box 154, Stouffville, L4A 7Z5, e-mail jmason@ymg.com

Council meetings moved to evenings for residents

All citizens of Whitchurch-Stouffville should know as of Jan. 13, all council meetings have been moved to 7 p.m. from the afternoon.

We implore you to make use of these meeting times to address your concerns.

The agendas are available at the town offices at 37 Sandford Dr., from the Whitchurch-Stouffville Public Library or from your local councillor on the Friday before the Tuesday meeting.

Please make use of this service.

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Service cuts to reduce tax increase weren't in election platforms

Letter to Mayor Sue Sherban.

I am writing to express my support for your efforts to maintain Whitchurch-Stouffville's current level of public services.

As I understand the current impasse between you and other councillors, you are prepared to raise property taxes in order to maintain our town's services.

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