



STAFF PHOTO/STEVE SOMERVILLE

Vaughan Liberal MP Maurizio Bevilacqua, seen here celebrating his federal election win in June, said Prime Minister Paul Martin should not have allowed Quebec Premier Jean Charest to represent Canada on a trade mission.

Vaughan Liberal slams PM

BY ROY GREEN
Staff Writer

A day after accusing Tory leader Stephen Harper of cozying up to Quebec separatists, Vaughan Liberal MP Maurizio Bevilacqua took a swing at his own leader for allowing Quebec Premier Jean Charest to represent Canada on a trade mission.

Mr. Bevilacqua, who was dropped from the federal cabinet soon after Paul Martin was elected, said the prime minister was allowing Quebec an unprecedented role in federal areas by allowing Mr. Charest to accompany the French prime minister on a trip to Mexico next month. "Canadians recognize the federal government speaks for Canada," he said in an interview Thursday.

"That is our domain and there is no role for the provinces there."

Mr. Bevilacqua is concerned the government will expand the concept of "asymmetrical federalism," the unique status given Quebec in the recently signed health accord between the federal government and provinces.

"When some people suggest the health accord was an important precedent to expand into other (federal/provincial) areas, I get worried," he said.

Earlier this week, Mr. Bevilacqua sent a letter to Conservative Leader Stephen Harper accusing him of trying to dismantle the country in league with Quebec separatists.

The letter followed a speech Mr. Harper made in Quebec last weekend, in which he speculated some current federal responsibilities might be better handled on a regional basis or even by language.

"As the leader of a national party, he hasn't thought through the role of the federal government," Mr. Bevilacqua said.

"Canadians expect a strong and effective federal government; they don't want any further devolution. The whole issue is quite divisive and ill-conceived."

York-Simcoe Conservative MP Peter Van Loan dismissed Mr. Bevilacqua's comments, saying the former cabinet minister is simply positioning himself for a future run at the Prime Minister's Office.

"Obviously, Mr. Bevilacqua feels isolated out of the cabinet and is preparing for a leadership run," Mr. Van Loan said.

"And we don't need to take lessons in national unity from a guy who has advocated currency union with the United States, as Mr. Bevilacqua has."

Feds probing how seized pot equipment auctioned off, re-used

BY MARTIN DERBYSHIRE
Staff Writer

The federal Ministry of Public Works and Government Services is investigating how marijuana growing equipment seized in police raids ended up back at a Whitchurch-Stouffville pot operation.

"It is our policy to destroy all hydroponic marijuana growing equipment and contaminated equipment which is seized by police," ministry spokesperson Jack Korwin said.

"The minister (Scott Brison) has asked us to do a thorough investigation to find out exactly what happened here because it is our policy that equipment like this wouldn't be re-sold."

He said the generators, dehumidifiers and fans that turned up in raids of a large-scale grow operation Aug. 11 must have slipped through the cracks.

The equipment had been previously seized in marijuana raids by York, Halton and London police over the past six years.

It turned out the confiscated items had been auctioned off by a private liquidation company, on behalf of the federal agency responsible for the management of drug paraphernalia confiscated by police services across the country.

Appalled by the discovery, York Regional Police Chief Armand La Barge urged the ministry to change the legislation so all equipment confiscated from marijuana grow operations is destroyed.

"This is not the first time officers have seen previously seized equipment back on the streets," he said.

"Obviously, this stuff is

finding its way back on to the auction lists," Chief La Barge said.

"We're seeing crates of fans and dehumidifiers being sold for less than \$10 and that's frustrating for police officers that it's finding its way back into the criminals' hands at such bargain basement prices."

'We're seeing crates of fans and dehumidifiers being sold for less than \$10 and that's frustrating for police officers...'

The Public Works Ministry understands Chief La Barge's frustrations, but it may not need to change the policy on seized equipment, Mr. Korwin said.

"In the past, we have donated hydroponic equipment to not-for-profit groups who can use it, like a botanical gardens for instance, but it's not supposed to be purchased for criminal

use. Our policy is to destroy it," he said.

The ministry has imposed a moratorium on the sale of equipment used in marijuana growing operations, Mr. Korwin added.

Although no timeline for the investigation has been discussed, this case is a "priority" for the ministry, Mr. Korwin said.

Chief La Barge has been in contact with Mr. Brison and was pleased to see the ministry has acted quickly. However, he's still hoping the government hears his pleas for permanent changes.

"Whether they need a change in policy or it's just a misinterpretation, at the end of the day, this stuff should not be sold at public auction," Chief La Barge said.

"It just makes sense that you simply take it out of circulation."

Newmarket Aurora MP Belinda Stronach supports Chief La Barge's recommendations.

"Here you have, on one hand, equipment being seized in the fight against drugs and then you turn around and it's being re-sold back to the public and being used to produce more drugs."

"This is wrong and I strongly support the chief on this," she said.

It is also wrong for the Liberal government to be moving toward decriminalizing marijuana, Ms. Stronach said.

"There is an obvious health and safety risk with the drug decriminalization could create future problems at the United States border and it does nothing to stem the growing tide of marijuana production around York Region and the rest of the country," Ms. Stronach said.



BELINDA STRONACH: Selling seized grow-op equipment wrong, York Region MP says.

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