

OPINION

Could our election be followed by byelection?

When I think of my hometown, I think of the street I grew up on, the houses that backed onto each other, no fences, creating one giant back yard with trees, gardens and a makeshift ball diamond, and hide-and-seek, bocci and croquet.

The families held a block party, the Back Yard Bash, in June. There was a little "burning schoolhouse" fireworks thing a parent would set alight. We'd all sing a song.

A dad two doors down gave out cans of grape pop on Halloween, which bothered other parents (visions of carpet stains), but my brothers and sisters and I loved this guy.

When you think of "home", do you think of your street?

Maybe you think of your neighbourhood, around a school or place of worship. Or a smaller village in a larger community: Maple in Vaughan, Unionville in



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Markham, Lemonville (love that name, although a lousy place for a car dealership) in Whitchurch-Stouffville.

Some might say Richmond Hill or Aurora, the larger official municipalities that make up our region.

On Monday we elected the people who will have important civic leadership roles in our many hometowns in York Region the next four years.

Rather than provincial or federal matters, they look after services that we experience right down at street level.

Interestingly though, after all this, one of the most important elections is yet to take place.

At the first meeting of York Region council, the members will elect a chairman from "one of the members of the regional council, or any other person".

If the person they elect is a member of one of the local councils, that person "shall be deemed to have resigned as a member of such council, and his seat on such council thereby becomes vacant," reads the act governing York Region.

Translation? If a mayor or regional councillor puts their name forward, they could become the chairperson and a byelection would be needed to find their replacement in the office to which they were just re-elected this week.

Not a great system, but that's what we have for now, until the position is by direct election, a change that would need to be brought in by the province.

So who are the possibilities?

The names of some mayors and regional councillors have been tossed around, but at this point these are all just conjecture.

The soon-to-be former mayor of Whitchurch-Stouffville, Wayne Emmerson, meanwhile, has made it known he is interested in replacing retiring regional chair Bill Fisch.

What Mr. Emmerson has going in his favour is there would be no expensive byelection to find his replacement. (Stouffville just picked a 32-year-old with no council experience who runs a farm market and petting zoo, who last winter worked out west in the oil fields, as their mayor-elect.)

And these days, there is a notion the public might rather simply see the appointment of a retired politician than one who was just elected, even if one of the latter is better suited for this important job, if it means saving the cost of a byelection.

The just elected politician

who stepped down (or up?) to be the chair/CEO might be vilified along with the regional council members who picked him or her.

But is that really fair? Should we not get the best person we can? Are we being "penny wise, pound foolish"?

York Region, our collective home, has become an important and growing city/region. The regional government oversees police, transit, water, food inspections, public health, paramedics and more. And makes key decisions on growth and development.

Having the right person in the chairman's seat could be vitally important. They would serve in a key leadership role as our region continues to grow and become more unified. Is that worth the cost of a byelection? I guess we'll find out at that first regional meeting.

Stouffville resident Bernie O'Neill is a York Region Media Group editor

Is it time for a change?

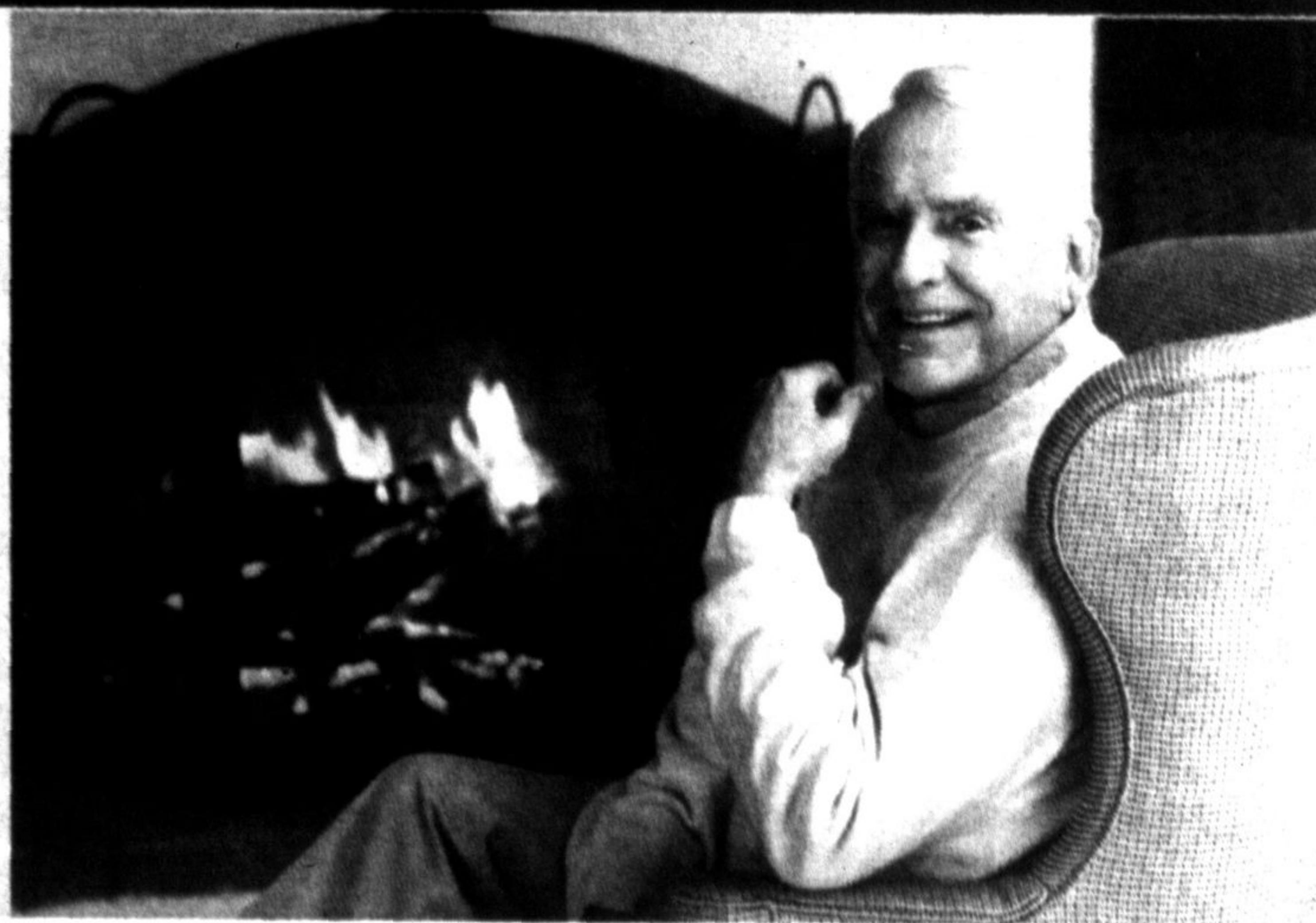
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