REPOR'T FROM OTTAWA

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Hamilton-Wentworth

As much as I appreciate these requests, I have accepted very few, preferring to spend weekdays on Parliament Hill and to return to Hamilton-Wentworth every weekend when possible.


While this "riding first" priority is very important to me as a Member of Parliament, I have learned that the decisions in which I am privileged to participate affect far more than my personal and political interests. I regard it as an essential part of my responsibility to the people of Hamilton-Wentworth to become acquainted with the issues of the day and to examine the effectiveness of Government policies. In my opinion, I shall benefit Canada as a whole.

This is no time to be writing a column.

In fact, you might agree that 2 o'clock early in a Monday morning is no time to be doing anything concrete, except getting some sleep in preparation for another week on Parliament Hill.

But, as the jet continues east into the darkness, sleep seems as far away as the ultimate destination of Ottawa.

When I boarded the flight in Vancouver, someone told me it was known as the "cardiac special", in recognition of the strain of overnight transcontinental travel, with stops in Edmonton, Winnipeg and Toronto.

Fortunately, everyone aboard appeared to be in good health and disposition, and those awake seemed given to the contemplation which the drone of engines brings on.

Perhaps the others are thinking about where they have been, or where this plane will take them.

For me, the preoccupation is with the Yukon and the rewarding experience of an all-too-brief visit there.
Since the election of last October, I have been honoured to receive a number of invitations to speak in various parts of Canada. As much as I appreciate these requests, I have accepted very few, preferring to spend weekdays on Parliament Hill and to return to Hamilton-Wentworth every weekend when possible. While this "riding first" priority is very important to me, it does not blind me to the fact that the decisions in which I am honoured to participate affect far more than the home area of any individual Member of Parliament. Indeed, I regard it as an essential part of my responsibility to the people of Hamilton-Wentworth to become aware of the situation and problems faced by their fellow Canadians in all parts of this Nation, and to act in a way that will benefit Canada as a whole.

Accordingly, I accepted one of the earliest and most challenging invitations I received, and left Ottawa on Friday (over a week before you will read this) with Erik Nielsen, M.P. for the Yukon, and Stan Schellenberger, the Member for Metaskwin, Alberta. Given that travel time between Whitehorse and Ottawa is over twelve hours, the duration of our actual stay in the Territory was obviously brief. However, it was a most active and eventful period, and the first day we managed to keep going for twenty-two hours before retiring. (After awhile, even a politician gets tired of talking!)
Thanks to the warm and friendly hospitality of Yukoners, it was also a most enjoyable visit to Canada's northern frontier.

Above all, it was an enriching experience, providing new and I think valuable insight into some of the issues frequently discussed in Parliament, and directly involving the people of the Yukon.

The Yukon is a land of such extraordinary scenery that no photographs or words are sufficient. Nor can they capture the colourful history of its early development, the most famous part of which was the Klondike Gold Rush.

But perhaps its most striking feature is the sense of excitement about the future of the Yukon, and the importance it will play in the Canada of tomorrow.

This feeling was conveyed in conversations with Yukoners, especially so during a lengthy seminar of free and frank discussion on a variety of topics.

The major issues ranged from the proposed gas pipeline, to the Indian land claims, to seeking of status as a province; and these were backed up by many more matters of concern, some of particular importance locally, and others which are felt throughout Canada.

As stated earlier, and realized by Yukoners, I can claim no extensive background in these problems and the journey was largely a learning experience for me.
At the same time, I tried to answer many of the questions on their minds, and to present them with my perspective of a system of Government which can be especially difficult for Yukoners to understand or identify with.

As well, I hope the exchange of information and opinions left an indication of the interest and concern I know are felt by Members from all parties in Parliament.

At the very least, I believe some success can be claimed in dispelling the image some had of the Hamilton area, and in convincing them that the Tiger-Cats are not such a bad bunch after all.

Time and space do not permit me to relate all that I experienced and learned on this trip.

But do let me share with you a strengthened conviction about the potential of Canada, and the value of working towards a Nation realizing that potential.

If we are to succeed in this quest, we must first know where this land is today; where it could be tomorrow; and the feelings of our countrymen about how we should get there.

In getting to know one another, we can learn a great deal about our Country and about ourselves.

The experience gives new meaning to that advertising slogan "Canada: Stand together. Understand together."