

Time for McGuinty to be quiet and start leading

This is an old joke. Although it pre-dates Dalton McGuinty, it has some relevance for the struggling premier.

A new premier was taking office. On the day of the handover, the outgoing premier told him he had left three numbered envelopes in his desk drawer. "When you have your first crisis, and you surely will, open the first envelope," he said. "The second one is for your second crisis, and so on."

Sure enough, the new premier soon faced a crisis: his government was drowning in red ink. Opening the first envelope, he read: "Blame me." Good advice, the premier thought, and he proceeded to denounce his predecessor for leaving behind such a mountain of debt that it made it impossible for the new government to keep its election promises.

Before long, a new crisis arose. Opening the second envelope, the premier read: "Blame the feds." So he launched an all-out attack on the federal government for short-changing the province, starving it for cash, and preventing the premier from meeting the aspirations of his electorate.

That tactic worked for quite a while, but inevitably a third crisis occurred.



GEOFFREY STEVENS

The premier opened the final envelope and read: "Prepare three envelopes."

As I said, the joke has been around longer than McGuinty, but he is following the pattern. When first elected, he blamed everything on his Conservative predecessors, Mike Harris and Ernie Eves, for leaving a huge deficit behind. Now he is on envelope number 2, blaming the feds for supposedly taking \$23 billion a year more out of Ontario than it returns.

It is a thin and cynical argument, serving only to paper over mediocre provincial leadership. Before long, however, McGuinty is going to have to stop whining and start governing if he wants to win re-election in 2007.

He's had an uncommonly easy run so far. The opposition Progressive Con-

servatives have been rudderless since the 2003 election. That will change on March 17 when John Tory, the new Conservative leader and a disciple of the much-admired Bill Davis, wins a seat in the Dufferin-Peel-Wellington-Grey by-election.

The fact that the Liberals are in a minority in Ottawa is also a blessing for McGuinty. A majority government, Liberal or Conservative, wouldn't hesitate to slap the pesky premier down. Prime Minister Paul Martin, however, can't afford to offend any Liberals, especially not in vote-rich Ontario. He's going to need their support sooner than later.

That's why Finance Minister Ralph Goodale is being so gentle with McGuinty. In meetings with the editorial boards of Toronto newspapers on Friday, Goodale said he was prepared to look at Ontario's complaints. He went so far as to tell Toronto Star editors that he might be willing to throw some extra money Ontario's way to assist the settlement of immigrants. But he wasn't about to accept the premier's math on the so-called gap of \$23 billion.

Goodale must have been tempted to



Federal Finance Minister Ralph Goodale has been gentle in his response to Premier Dalton McGuinty's complaints about how Ottawa treats Ontario.

tell him to do his homework. As the most populous province, Ontario gets far more money from Ottawa than any other province. That amount is rising significantly every year. A case can be made — and is made, strenuously, in other regions — that Ontario, far from being discriminated against, is the favoured child, the prime beneficiary, of Confederation.

McGuinty's \$23-billion gap is an illusion. As Goodale has noted, it doesn't take account of the billions that Ottawa pours into Ontario to support the auto industry and for such causes as scientific research and universities.

If the finance minister did not have to be nice to the premier, he might remind him there is only one taxpayer,

and both levels of government have to serve her. Yes, some taxes collected in Ontario are distributed to people in the poorer regions of the country, which enables them to strengthen their economies — and to buy more goods and services from Ontario.

But there's also an internal redistribution. Taxes collected from residents of Ontario's prosperous cities — Kitchener, Waterloo, Cambridge, Guelph, London and Ottawa, as well as Toronto — are used to strengthen the poorer regions of the province, which builds a stronger Ontario economy.

Finally, if Goodale were in a position to be brutally honest, he would tell McGuinty that fed-bashing serves no constructive purpose. It brings our political system into disrepute. It is the sign of an intellectually bankrupt provincial administration.

McGuinty had better get over it if he doesn't want to have to open that third envelope.

• Cambridge resident Geoffrey Stevens is an author and teaches political science at Wilfrid Laurier University and the University of Guelph. He welcomes comments at geoffstevens@sympatico.ca

MIDDLE EAST

U.S. may not like democracy's results

By JUAN COLE

With the emergence of Shiite physician Ibrahim al-Jaafari as the leading candidate for Iraqi prime minister last week, the contradictions of Bush administration policy in the Middle East have become even clearer than they were before.

U.S. President George W. Bush says he's committed to democratizing the region, yet he also wants governments to emerge that are friendly to the United States, benevolent to their own people, secular, capitalist and willing to stand up and fight against anti-American radicals.

But what if democratic elections do not produce such governments? What if the newly elected regimes are friendly to states and groups Washington considers enemies? What if the spread of democracy through the region empowers elements that don't share American values and goals?

"The fact is, democracy is an unruly process; it doesn't always yield the results we want or expect."

The recent election in Iraq is a case in point. The two major parties in the victorious Shiite alliance are al-Jaafari's party, the Dawa, founded in the late 1950s to work for an Islamic republic, and the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq, the goal of which can be guessed from its name. To be fair, both have backed away from their more radical stances of earlier decades. But both parties — and al-Jaafari himself — were sheltered in Tehran in the 1980s by Washington's archenemy, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, and both acknowledge that they want to move Iraq toward Islamic law and values.

The victorious Shiite fundamentalists have already taken steps that may be making the Bush administration nervous. They made it clear they would attempt to incorporate their paramilitaries into the new Iraqi army. The Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution has the Badr Corps, made up of about 15,000 men under arms trained originally by the Iranian Revolutionary Guards, and Dawa has its own paramilitary.

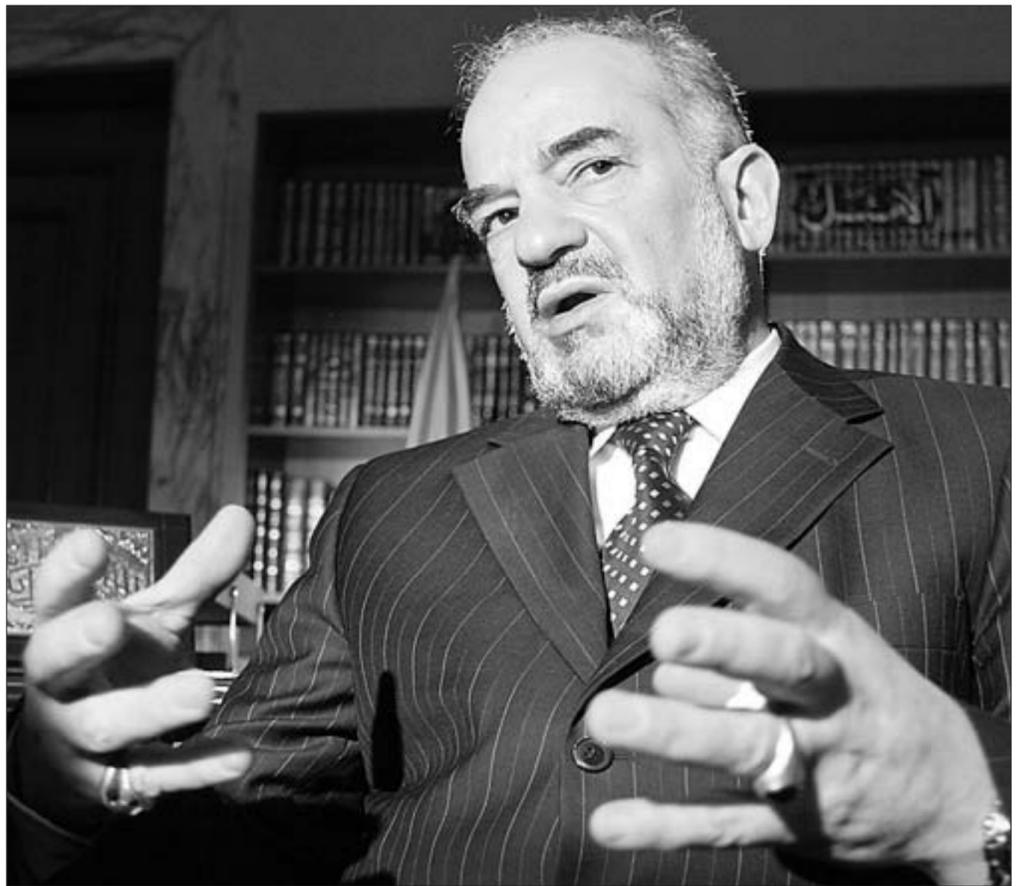
The two parties also announced they would try to bring into the government's armed forces members of the Al Mahdi militia of Shiite nationalist Muqtada al-Sadr, who have fought hard battles against the U.S. military in Najaf and elsewhere. Al-Jaafari has previously said he hoped to bring al-Sadr into the Iraqi government. Al-Jaafari likewise has protested U.S. military action in Fallujah.

In interviews, al-Jaafari has warned against deliberate attempts to undermine Iraq's relations with neighbouring Iran, which he has visited on several occasions for consultations since the fall of Saddam Hussein.

To be fair, al-Jaafari has emerged as a moderate and skillful politician, and his devotion to his faith should in principle be no more objectionable than Bush's own devotion to Christianity. Yet it certainly seems that his new government will adopt policies far less welcome in Washington than those of interim Prime Minister Ayad Allawi.

In the current struggle over whether the fundamentalist Lebanese Shiite party, Hezbollah, should be designated a terrorist organization, it seems clear that both the Dawa and the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq will side with Hezbollah.

The fact is, democracy is an unruly process; it doesn't always yield the results we want or expect. Bush likes to talk in terms of good versus evil, to suggest that the forces of



ASSOCIATED PRESS

Shiite leader Ibrahim al-Jaafari seems a good bet to become the new prime minister of Iraq, despite American concerns.

freedom and democracy are doing battle with the defenders of tyranny — but he should be aware that the world isn't always that simple.

He should remember, for instance, the 2002 elections in Pakistan, pushed for by Washington, which produced an unexpectedly good showing for the United Action Council, a coalition of hard-line fundamentalist parties. Some of them had helped train the Taliban. They won 17 per cent of federal seats, won outright in the Northwest Frontier Province and now govern Baluchistan in coalition. Their leaders argued that al-Qaida was merely a figment of U.S. imagination.

A full disaster was averted in Pakistan only because the federal government was still dominated by military dictator Gen. Pervez Musharraf. Nevertheless, the United Action Council has attempted to impose a draconian version of Islamic law in the provinces it controls and has not been helpful to the United States in tracking down al-Qaida operatives.

Pakistan and Iraq are not the only countries where elections have had mixed results. Although the Palestinian elections in January were widely viewed as a success — produc-

ing a pragmatic prime minister, Mahmoud Abbas — remember that the radical fundamentalist party, Hamas, boycotted those elections. Then, less than three weeks later, local elections were held — and Hamas won decisively in the Gaza Strip, leaving it more influential than before and poised for even bigger wins in next July's legislative elections.

And in recent years, democratization has also put Hezbollah in the Lebanese parliament. Serbian nationalists have won seats in Belgrade.

Are such outcomes acceptable to the U.S. administration? If not, how will it respond? Given the war on terrorism, it's unlikely to simply take these electoral setbacks lying down.

But if Washington falls back on its traditional responses — covert operations, attempts to interfere in parliamentary votes with threats or bribes, or dependence on strong men such as Musharraf — the people of the Middle East might well explode, because the only thing worse than living under a dictatorship is being promised a democracy and then not really getting it.

• Los Angeles Times

Progress in downtown Kitchener a reason for optimism

It's easy to be optimistic about the future in Waterloo Region. It's one of the best things about living here.

As good a city as Toronto is, it's at a crossroads. If I still lived there, I would be terrified of the challenges ahead, and the local politicians' abilities to handle them.

But I don't live there anymore. I live here. This isn't to say Waterloo Region is without problems, but urban sprawl is largely under control, our finances are in order, and our council meetings are cordial. Unemployment is low. We will have a population of 700,000 by 2041; we may even have rail transit within the next decade. Although challenges exist, there is no fear that Waterloo Region will experience the "white-flight" downtown degradation that has been suffered by many American cities, and which Toronto risks if it is not careful.

And the most encouraging sign of all: it didn't used to be this way.

When my family moved to Kitchener



**JAMES BOW
COMMUNITY EDITORIAL
BOARD**

in 1991, we were delighted with our neighbourhood: nice houses, well-developed trees, and everything within walking distance. However, we quickly discovered that we had a crack house down the street. The neighbourhood five blocks down was not a place to walk at night. (We didn't have that problem in big, bad Toronto).

That wasn't all. Kitchener's downtown was half full, with such buildings as the old Goudie's department store empty husks. The city was reeling

from the bad planning decisions of the 1960s, which cost it a fantastic neo-classical city hall and was driving downtown stores to suburban malls. If people wanted someplace to stroll and shop, they went to uptown Waterloo.

The downtown hit its low point in the mid-1990s when an arsonist started burning abandoned stores. Great gaping holes started to appear in our core.

And that was the moment Kitchener residents had enough.

More people may have lived in the suburbs than in downtown, but downtown Kitchener was the face of Kitchener, and it was embarrassing us.

Revitalization became an election issue. Priorities shifted. Victoria Park got support, its drug pusher mess cleaned up, and it came back as a downtown amenity. Victoria Public School, shut down due to a dwindling population, was turned into a seniors co-op and revitalized the area.

Then the City of Kitchener really got to work.

Despite controversy, the city razed a block of rundown stores in the middle of downtown Kitchener to build a new city hall. Council, which had been meeting in leased office space, moved into a state-of-the-art building with a large public square. It may have been expensive, but it gave the downtown a focal point. A block of decay had been eliminated, and the city showed its intention to stay downtown. Real renewal swept out from there.

The derelict areas were bought up and cleaned up. The Water Street Theatre was moved out of its backroom digs into a state-of-the-art theatre rising on one of the parcels of land burned down by the arsonist. The Goudie's shell was opened up into a children's museum. In our own area, the crackhouses were raided, expropriated, renovated and sold to responsible owners. The impoverished area five blocks from our home now boasts the brand new farmers' market.

Most recently, The Record has

shown its faith in the future of downtown Kitchener by vacating its suburban offices and returning to the core.

I've only scratched the surface of all that the City of Kitchener and the Region of Waterloo have done to bring downtown Kitchener back. Wherever they could, the City of Kitchener tried to make its downtown a place to live and play instead of just work and shop or possibly avoid. The rot has slowly disappeared. Downtown Kitchener now boasts an area of relatively low crime, and a neighbourhood population of over 10,000.

It's great being a part of an improving community. An optimistic city can't help but improve one's own outlook on life.

But there are battles still to win.

• James Bow is a graduate of the University of Waterloo's regional and urban planning department and is a member of The Record's Community Editorial Board.