

O'Malley takes centre stage

By Carol Johnstone

Gerry O'Malley is the first born-and-bred north-end-er to make it to the provincial cabinet. And, he's been busy. "Since about last Monday afternoon (March 20 at 2 p.m. when he was sworn in), I haven't stopped really, to do much but breathe," O'Malley says, his voice hoarse with what sounds like a cold gone to his chest.

Born in 1927 on what is now Fuller Terrace, Halifax Needham MLA O'Malley is now minister of supply and services with a \$35,943 per year raise, bringing his salary up to \$79,782. He is responsible for a department that had a 1993-94 budget of \$85.4 million and 566 funded staff positions. The department oversees areas from building design and construction, to government rentals, to computer services, to environmental clean-ups.

Last Friday, O'Malley flew to Sydney to look at a new hospital, a courthouse, the coke ovens and a \$60-million tar ponds environmental clean-up project "that isn't working," he says.

That is the most ungodly site in all of Canada, environmentally speaking."

Sitting in his brand new office on the 14th floor of the Maritime Centre Building on Barrington and Spring Garden Road, overlooking tiny George's Island, O'Malley admits he was disappointed at not being chosen for cabinet when the Liberals took power in 1993.

"Sure I was hurt," he says. "But what you're really hurt from in the political world, seriously, you're hurt for yourself, but you're deeply hurt for those who supported you. . . . you feel that somehow you've let them down because you didn't measure up."

NDP caucus leader Robert Chisholm says he doesn't want to be "overly unfair to Gerry, but I really think that general wisdom has it that he's in cabinet simply for the purposes of protecting John Savage's leadership.

"I think Gerry did a good job as Deputy Speaker," Chisholm adds. "As a member of the opposition, I thought he was fair and tried to be reasonable and to impart the rules as objectively and as impartially as possible, and I appreciated that and I told him that."

Chisholm says that while he doesn't see O'Malley making any drastic changes, "I think that he'll probably do fine."

O'Malley says he doesn't plan to neglect his north-end constituents, even though, "when you're in cabinet... you represent the whole of the province. But for my own constituency, of course," he adds, "I've got lots of problems in there", including housing for seniors and public projects.



PHOTO: DAVID MCGUFFIN

MLA Gerry O'Malley takes it all in stride as he sits in his new office as minister of supply and services. He says the new responsibilities won't affect his commitment to the north end.

He doesn't expect any quick resolution to the Africville compensation issue. "We have to continue to ensure that the Africville community doesn't fade into oblivion historically," he says, but then adds that because the legislation for amalgamation will be introduced into the House next week, he doesn't see a decision being made about compensation any time soon. "I think that has to be held in abeyance for the new governmental structure."

O'Malley plans to still be available to his constituents at his home phone - 455-2014 - to answer questions and help solve problems.

"For me, I'm here and I work 20 hours a day, because I want to do something for this great city of ours," O'Malley says. "I'm sincere and that's not BS. That's fact."