

2

Peel Bldg. Bk.

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Low profile for Gregory

When Bud Gregory first became a City Councillor in Mississauga in January 1971 his first remarks to his colleagues indicated he planned to "keep my head down until I know what I'm doing."

Last week, Gregory resumed his head down position in his new role as Ontario's Minister of Revenue.

After four years as a Minister Without Portfolio, Gregory was promoted to the Revenue position in a Cabinet shuffle.

He plans to spend the remainder of the summer and early fall learning all he can about the Ministry's operation before Revenue Ministry is to collect money on behalf of the government through various taxes it imposes.

"I'm not looking for any spectacular changes," says the 57-year-old Minister.

"I plan to learn a lot before I open my mouth," says Gregory. "I'm going to be very careful what I say."

His predecessor, George Ashe, found himself in difficulty over statements he made about revisions planned to property assessment in Ontario, probably the prickliest issue the Ministry faces.

"It's a very, very difficult situation," says Gregory. "How it will be tackled, I don't know."

The idea of a uniform "market value assessment" system has been proposed several times and has been extensively studied by the government. But if it were introduced it would mean major tax increases for residents of Metro Toronto.

Gregory says that perhaps property assessment should become a municipal responsibility, with local assessors determining the value of homes on which taxes are based.

"It's difficult to do anything in this area without creating hardships," says the Mississauga East MPP who has also been Conservative Whip for the past several years, a job he now gives up. "But then you can't make an omelet without breaking a few eggs," he adds. "We have to find the system which is most equitable to all."

Gregory also expressed concern about a problem which has bothered local municipal councillors for years, the fact that valuable lands awaiting development in the city are often assessed at very low agricultural rates.

"There's a basic unfairness in allowing land which is destined for development to be assessed as farmland just because somebody threw a few seeds on it," says Gregory.