

Coping with the health care iceberg

Treasurer Bob Nixon fired the first shot across the bows of the health-care iceberg in his April 20 budget.

He narrowed his aim and fired the second shot during a speech last week at a Chamber of Commerce meeting just north of here.

The first shot: "If health care costs continue to escalate at rates experienced in the recent past, other social and economic priorities will be placed at risk."

The second, at a chamber meeting in Kleinburg: Hospitals that run a deficit this year won't have it met by the province, he said, "even if they prove good management."

Health care now involved one-third of all provincial spending, up from 27 per cent only a decade ago.

In dollars, it amounts to \$12.7 billion this year. More important, it is an escalating and accelerating figure.

Last year, health spending grew 11.5 per cent (when the economy grew 9.3 per cent and inflation 5.1 per cent). The year before, it was 10.5 per cent; the year before that, 9.3; then 8.3; 7.6; 6.8 and so on each year as one travels back.



Queen's Park
By Derek Nelson
Thomson News Service

MONSTER

That's why the comparison with an iceberg is apt. Health-care spending is a huge and virtual unturnable monster, much of its detail hidden from view.

But, as Nixon warned: if it isn't diverted or slowed, it will likely plow under every other government program.

He wasn't specific about remedies, but in his budget statement, he dropped hints about who should be paying attention.

"Because of the magnitude of health-care expenditures and their growing share of overall spending, we must continue to look for productivity improvements and lower cost alternatives... this will require the assistance and co-operative effort of all participants in the health-care

sector. The boards that run our hospitals... the physicians who provide medical services under OHIP have the important responsibility to act in as cost-effective a manner as possible."

"The key to holding down tax burdens... is for both the government and those groups directly responsible for the conduct of these programs to recognize their shared responsibility for effective control of spending," he said.

To hammer the point home, Nixon attached an appendix to the budget that singled out three health care growth areas.

One was hospital operation, where per capita expenditures have been rising at more than nine per cent per year, and overall costs at more than 10 per cent.

Mind - you, the Liberals' willingness to pick up hospital deficits during their two minority government years (in order to avoid controversy) has exacerbated the problem. Such easiness with money sent out the message that if a hospital made budget it was dumb - since the province would rescue it

anyway. Still, hospitals now absorb only 44 per cent of the health-care budget, compared to 52 per cent a decade ago.

REAL GROWTH

The real growth area in health-care spending is the Ontario Health Insurance Plan (OHIP), which, in the main, means payments to physicians and other practitioners, but also includes soaring use of laboratory services.

OHIP costs grew almost 14 per cent on a per capita basis over the past decade, or an average of 15 per cent overall.

The average number of claims per capita went from 6.8 to 10.1 over that period. Interestingly, the growth rate in the number of doctors is also on the rise, up 4.7 per cent last year.

Lastly, the budget paper zeroed in on the Ontario Drug Benefit Plan, which, while only four per cent of health ministry expenditures, has doubled its share in a decade and is increasing at more than 21 per cent per annum.

There are several provincial task forces looking at these three matters, and they may or may not advance solutions. But something must happen.

The bottom line from the budget statement remains: "New ways must be found to control rising health-care costs..." Nixon's warnings are only the first two shots.

Think first

Figures released on Halton Hills' councillors' attendance records should say something to would-be politicians contemplating throwing their hat in the ring for the upcoming fall municipal election.

Lifestyles can change drastically in very short order, and unless candidates go in with both eyes open, they could find themselves in for a rude awakening.

Two Halton Hills councillors who showed the highest absenteeism rate, can well attest to how fast things can change.

It would be unfair to place blame on these councillors for not being able to carry out their duties to the best of their constituents' expectations. After all, it merely boils down to a matter of survival.

But at the same time, this hammers home a very important point for those thinking of running in November.

Devotion in council members while they are serving in office is not only expected, it's demanded.

Anyone entering politics must realize they have to pay a certain price, and if they think they can shortchange ratepayers, they're sadly mistaken.

While no one can foresee what strange or uncalculated twists their lifestyle might take, they can at least assure the voting public that they are in a position to carry out their duties to the betterment of the community.

Some will look at the upcoming municipal elections as a means of testing their popularity in the community. Having their name on the ballot will be little more than a way of feeding their ego.

But when the election dust settles, there will be a great deal of work to attend to.

And anyone entering politics with the intentions of producing anything less than a whole-hearted effort on behalf of the community, will quickly be weeded out of the fold.

Wine and dine

Organizers of the prestigious Economic Summit want to put on the dog for foreign leaders.

Good impressions are important in these worldly affairs. And Toronto doesn't want foreign devils thinking us unsophisticated country bumpkins, even if we are.

In accordance, Ontario will relax its antiquated liquor laws to allow 24-hour revelry for three days in June.

After all, what business is it of ours that some delegate, or member of his or her entourage, might want a short snort at sunrise after a tough day and night solving the problems of the world?

A pub and restaurant will operate 24-hours a day during the summit. Free booze will be available anytime to the 1,600 delegates, 5,000 support staff and 4,000 international media.

The rest of us, of course, can only watch the revelry from the sidelines. The free-flowing tap is limited to a six acre "tent city" on the parking lot, across from the Metro Convention Centre, called "Summit Square" and only those accredited for the summit will be allowed entry.

It's a strange world that measures sophistication by the shot glass. But Canadian officials, organizing this summit, plan to give visiting dignitaries and their hangers on full measure.

It's odd that these men of the world, women too, wouldn't think to bring their own private stock. Maybe they are not so cosmopolitan after all.

It's fine to impose government's warped sense of morality on the citizens of the province, but we wouldn't want to give these worldly-wise people the impression that we are something we are.

What's got us puzzled is what wit considers a libation in a tent at sunrise cosmopolitan?

-Courtesy Brampton Daily Times

End of the line for Hockey Moms



Editor's notebook

By Mike Turner
Herald Editor

It came as an ironic shock that the announcement of the demise of the Hockey Moms Association in Georgetown was so close to that special time of the year, Mother's Day.

"Shock" may be an inappropriate term. Perhaps someone just has a flare for the dramatics.

Anyway, it looks as though Georgetown will say adieu to a fine organization, and a vital branch of the Georgetown Minor Hockey Association.

When I first came to Georgetown, and attended my first hockey tournament, I was enlightened to the work and importance of the Hockey Moms.

Naturally, the most obvious thing I noticed at this tournament was several ladies scampering around, carrying impressively decorated cakes. No matter what happens, I guess it will always be these cakes that will bring the Hockey Moms.

I've realized that this wasn't an original idea, by any means, but it added a certain "flavor" to hockey tournaments in town, and the gesture was certainly appreciated

by the visitors. But now it appears all this hoopla will go by the way, since there seems little hope of reviving the group.

As I said, the decorated cakes will most likely be what I will associate with the Hockey Moms, but the truth is, the organization did so much more than this.

Their fund raising efforts were monumental in helping bolster the minor hockey coffers, and from a financial standpoint, their contributions will certainly be missed.

But the other projects that fell to the Hockey Moms, including the annual hockey equipment exchanges, and jacket sales, will undoubtedly suffer as well.

The GMHA has lost an intricate mechanism in their system. Certainly there will be people who will help patch the gaps - many will probably even be former members of the Hockey Moms.

But to be without this structured organization will be a distinct setback. It will be difficult to come up with a pool of resources so reliable and dedicated.

It's no secret that the Hockey Moms were having trouble generating membership interest over the last year.

And who knows, maybe in a short time they'll be able to regroup and carry on their excellent work.

But it's discouraging that matters have already reached the desperate point they have.

Citizens' forum

Apathy brings Moms' demise

EDITOR'S NOTE: The following letter, addressed to the community, was submitted for publication in the Herald.

Dear GMHA Executive and Members-at-large,

It is with great reluctance that I, as secretary, hereby announce the folding of the Georgetown Hockey Moms organization. Try as we might, we are unable to recruit sufficient new membership and the old members cannot continue on without them. There exists an air of apathy amongst the hockey community and although people seem ready to help, they are unwilling to participate in a more concrete role - i.e. convening a project, attending meetings regularly, or running for executive. Since none of the present executive are ready or willing to resume a position for the following year, we have no choice but to close the books on this organization.

The five-year history of the Hockey Moms has been very impressive. The monies generated by our fund-raising has been phenomenal considering only a handful of women at any given time were responsible. The approximate total raised is over \$43,000. The major sources were the Pay-What-You-Full tickets which allowed us to present the GMHA with over \$5,000 per year, over four years; the equipment exchange and the hockey jackets; the fruit sales; the Vitafilm; and the Nevada tickets which were a success in this their first year. It was our idea to charge admission on Day of Champs which proved financially worthwhile. Minor fund raisers included the food served at tournaments, raffles, and cookbooks.

We deserve a huge pat on the back. It is unfortunate that too much has fallen on the shoulders of too few. The demands put on us by our fast-paced and full lifestyles stretch our durability to the limit. There comes a time when one has to step back, take a deep breath, and either go on or say, "Enough is enough."

Five years ago it was our wish to provide the "extras" to kids in hockey. We have sponsored two teams for the past three years; cakes and pop at tournaments and

Day of Champs were a huge success as were the hot dogs and pop at the latter event. The Tykes were thrilled with their Christmas stocking stuffed to the brim. The jacket flashes were out way of reaching every child in minor hockey. We provided funds for year-end parties upon request, and made donations to teams requiring assistance with transportation expenses. Hockey Moms provided an invaluable service working on the gate, the souvenir table, and the canteen for tournaments.

It is our sincere wish that the GMHA will carry on with our more lucrative campaigns. We feel it is essential that the equipment exchange and hockey jackets be made available as they not only generate funds but provide a service to the hockey population. To this end, summaries of these and other successful fundraisers will be prepared in the hopes of having these projects continued.

There is a sense of satisfaction and fulfillment in being a part of one's child's recreation. Without volunteers virtually no sporting event could survive, this we know. To this end, we wish to extend our gratitude to the hockey parents and kids who co-operated with our projects; their participation was invaluable.

It goes without saying that the Hockey Moms could not have existed without the recognition and support of the GMHA. For the most part, this association has given us free rein in our fundraising activities with a minimum of interference.

As a final request, we are suggesting that our Atom-Peeewe trophy be presented to the rep. jr. league goaltender. We are also requesting that a portion of our funds be spent on a copier for the GMHA office.

It is not our intention to let down the hockey players or the GMHA. It is a sad moment for us Moms who have been actively involved. We wish the 1988-89 GMHA executive

and directors much success in the coming season.

Yours sincerely,
Gail Bennett, Secretary,
Mary Jepson, President; Linda Lee, vice-president; Jean-Ellen Minnich, treasurer; Judy Pries, convener; Molly Green, phoning committee; Karen Sykes, cake decorator.

Saved our soles

Dear Sir,
Just a word of thanks to those far-sighted members of our town council.

I, for one, appreciate their efforts in protecting their constituents from paying unduly low prices on footwear.

It certainly won't go unnoticed at the next election that these people are doing their utmost to keep the riff-raff out of town by maintaining high prices.

However, a truly ambitious councillor who wanted to achieve higher office could add the following to their list. The service club that sells fertilizer should be banned from the city streets, since it will hurt sales in nurseries and hardware stores. Grocery stores would be better off if we could just get those little girls to stay off the streets and stop selling cookies.

I'm sure there are even other ways that the people we elect could be doing more to save the electorate from themselves.

I would appreciate reading the names of those councillors who are looking after us so well. It's important in our free enterprise, capitalistic country, that their efforts not be unrewarded at the next election.

Jim Walker,
Georgetown

In your opinion

Question: What is your favorite car to drive? (Asked at the Georgetown

District High School car wash.)

Your favorite wheels . . .



KATHY PRICE: "A Hyundai because it is economical, gives me no problems and services all my needs."



BOB YATES: "An Oldsmobile. It is big and it is comfortable."



SYLVIA GALBRAITH: "Porsche 928. I like the way it looks. I imagine it would handle really well."



MELVIN ROBERTSON: "Camaro. I like the class of the car."



ALISON HEARD: "Corvette. I like the look - the shape. It is fast. I would get it yellow if I had a choice."

Halton's History
from our files

30 years ago
D.M.W. (Bill) Wilson was appointed director of public relations for Delrex Developments Ltd. and associated companies. Mr. Wilson was formerly managing director of the National Warm Air Heating and Air Conditioning association.

15 years ago
Clambering over a fire truck was part of the fun for the 1st Georgetown Brownies when they toured the fire department. Brownies Christine Fudge, Diane Melton, Carolyn Booth and Donna Friesen listed as Brown Owl Marion Booth pointed out the pieces of fire equipment.

10 years ago
Georgetown District High School students Ken Heaton and Nick Bable, placed first in the written portion of the Annual Chrysler Trouble-Shooting contest.

5 years ago
Bernard Benditti, a member of the 8th Georgetown Cub Pack, was the championship winner of the Lions Club sponsored Cub Kar Rally Race. John Colton captured the Tough Luck award.