

Editorial

Allow disabled their dignity

Georgetown resident, Neil Brookbanks, has a beef against the Town of Halton Hills.

Mr. Brookbanks is disabled - suffering from chronic osteoarthritis and chronic fibrositis - and feels he is being discriminated against because of his disabilities concerning the Town's snow removal policies.

Mr. Brookbanks filed a complaint with the Ontario Human Rights Commission over the snow removal issue and claimed, in an interview with Halton Hills Herald senior reporter, Ben Dummett, "I'm not doing this for myself, I'm doing it for all handicapped in Town."

At present, in the Town of Halton Hills, there is no bylaw requiring residents to clear the snow from sidewalks fronting or abutting their property and similarly, the Town decides which roads and sidewalks get priority for snow removal when three or four inches of the white, fluffy flakes descend.

As Town of Halton Hills Mayor, Russ Miller, explained, in a common-sense approach to snow removal, "People can't continue to demand more services and object to higher taxes. If every sidewalk was cleared, people's taxes would be three times higher than they are now."

The Mayor makes a good point, but to paraphrase a metaphor, it still leaves the handicapped in Halton Hills, out in the cold.

The handicapped, both physically and mentally, are constantly forced to deal with situations which might best be described as the ultimate in double jeopardy.

Their handicaps prevent them from leading a normal life, and, for the most part, limitations are acknowledged.

But frustrations set in when non-handicapped persons can't see beyond the limitations and either patronize or ignore those who are physically or mentally disabled. This scenario is played out time after time in communities throughout Canada, including Halton Hills.

The times they are a-changing, however, and both the federal and provincial governments are taking steps to get the handicapped back into the mainstream of Canadian life.

Secretary of State, Robert de Cotret, the federal minister responsible for the disabled, has announced a new five-year program to allow the disabled easier access to education and better housing. In unveiling the program, de Cotret was quoted as saying, "Quite a few of the proposals will take effect immediately."

As announced, the program will involve 10 federal departments focusing on employment, transportation, education and recreation for the disabled.

As noted in a Toronto Star story, of the 3.3 million Canadians with disabilities, only 40 per cent are working compared to 70 per cent of the rest of the population.

Ontario Citizenship Minister, Elaine Ziemba, has also gone on record as saying the province wants to do more for the disabled. "We can't shut these people (the disabled) out of our society - they're very useful and they have resources," the minister is quoted as saying.

Although Ms. Ziemba has not elaborated on any provincial plans for the disabled, she is quoted as saying, "We will see more disabled people working."

This past Monday, Attorney General Howard Hampton introduced legislation at Queen's Park designed to protect adults with mental disabilities from exploitation, abuse and neglect while giving adults who are mentally capable the legal right to create their own "living will."

Hopefully, the respective federal and provincial politicians will live up to their promises to the disabled - only time will tell.

At the crux of the matter, however, for the disabled, is something no politician can legislate.

It is that innate core within the human called dignity.

Having lost a part of themselves due to a disability, it is dignity, more than anything else, that the handicapped person demands to retain. Surely, in our so-called enlightened society, this is not too much to ask.

College reunion

Dear Editor:

The Alumni Office at Fleming College wants to hear from you!

Please contact us at: Sir Sandford Fleming College, Sutherland Campus, Brealey Drive, Peterborough, Ontario K9J 7B1. Phone: (705) 743-5610 ext. 1501 or 1402, or: Sir Sandford Fleming College, Frost Campus, P.O. Box 8000, Lindsay, Ontario, K9V 5E6.

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Please send us your change of address, phone number and news. We are approaching our 25th Anniversary in 1992 and many activities are being planned, so don't miss out on these events.

Lori Birrell,
Alumni Officer,
Sir Sandford Fleming College.

The Halton Hills HERALD

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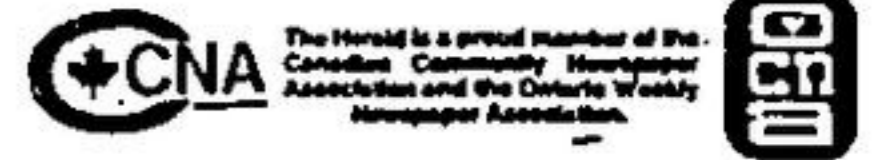
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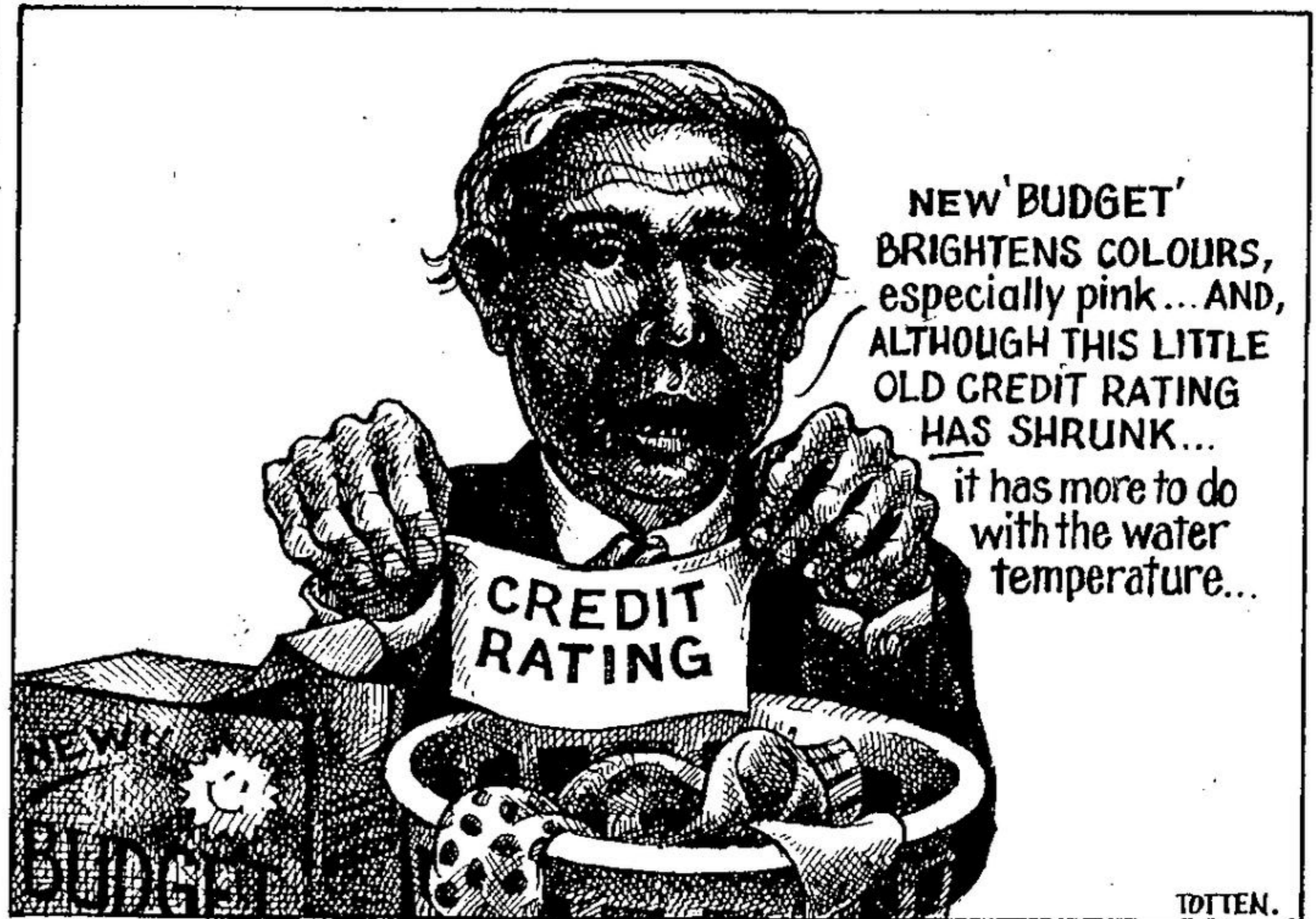
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People's Forum

NDP naivete, ignorance deplored

Dear Editor:

I become absolutely incensed when I see the naivete and apparent ignorance shown by some of our new NDP, MPP's. I am referring in particular to Mr. Noel Duignan and his recent report on the delayed auto insurance legislation. Mr. Duignan was trying to explain why his government has stalled in their move ahead with a new auto insurance plan for Ontario.

It is with Mr. Duignan's reference to the insurance industry's complaints of "uncertainty" and "indecision" relating to their profits and not to the concerns of drivers that I become embarrassed for Mr. Duignan and his complete lack of understanding of the situation.

The new No-Fault insurance system introduced last June, has allowed auto insurance companies to begin a return to profitable positions and premiums are coming down. If it weren't for the spectre of the Government takeover, rates would be coming down even faster. Premiums through the 1990's rose considerably as claims costs rose. These costs have now been contained. The industry is no longer paying half a billion dollars a year in legal costs, and claims costs are more predictable. This recent return to profitability has seen the market competing for the consumer's business and lowering rates. State Farm has dropped its rates and Dominion of Canada has announced that it is going to follow suit. Others will be following. What's holding companies back is this "political uncertainty."

In fact, if it weren't for the

threat of Government taking over the auto insurance business, the public would be benefitting now from even lower rates!

This begs the question of what guarantee there would be for lower insurance premiums, as Mr. Duignan suggests, if the government takes over the industry? Mr. Justice Coulter Osborne did an extensive study of the industry and came to the conclusion that the lack of competition would erode any savings a government plan might provide. Competition is the key to keeping the price of auto insurance as low as possible.

Good old Noel seems to think that "profit" for a company is a bad thing.

Has he forgotten that without "profits" companies shut down operations, lay-off employees, reduce their product lines and availability and reduce purchases of equipment and supplies necessary to produce their products, thus affecting other companies? It appears so. But it was convenient for his government to add a 3% premium tax on auto insurance premiums in the last budget. This will eat up whatever profits the companies are making and no doubt be passed onto us, the consumer.

It seems that he has also forgotten that insurance companies need a certain amount of "profit" or "policyholder protection fund" or else the government shuts them down. Would Mr. Duignan put his money in a bank that never made a profit and was on the verge of bankruptcy? Probably not. Would he trust his financial security to an insurance

company that was not strong enough to back up its promise of protection? It seems that that is exactly what he prefers.

I suppose that this should not come as a surprise to us when our NDP government has gone ahead and spent 9.7 billion dollars they don't have. Who will pay in the long run? We will, of course, with higher taxes. Do I want to trust my car insurance to this type of irresponsibility? Never!

My letter won't come as a surprise to Mr. Duignan. I have been trying to correspond with him since September. It took him 4 months to respond to the first letter and there has been no response to the second one, written in February. How's that for public service? Maybe deep down he knows that his government can't fix something that's not broken.

Sincerely,
Sandra L. Moon,
Georgetown.

Write us a letter!

The Herald wants to hear from you. If you have an opinion you want to express or a comment to make, send us a letter or drop by the office. Our address is 45 Guelph Street, Georgetown, Ontario L7G 3Z6.

All letters must be signed. Please include your address and telephone number for verification.

The Herald reserves the right to edit letters due to space limitations.