

## Numbers game

It seems our regional government has taken to performing a little budgetary spin doctoring.

The headline of a press release issued last week by Halton Region triumphantly proclaimed, *Halton Regional Council unanimously approves 2011 budget—0.2 per cent tax reduction for regional programs and services.*

The news release then boasted how the reduction in regional programs and services amounted to a \$1.50 reduction in annual taxes for a typical Halton household.

“The regional tax reduction was achieved while maintaining and enhancing service levels for Halton’s community,” said Regional Chair Gary Carr in the same press release.

Sounds too good to be true, doesn’t it?

That’s because it is.

Buried about halfway down the release comes the following statement: “When combined with the 4.4 per cent increase in the Halton Regional Police Service budget, Halton taxpayers will see an increase of 1.4 per cent in the total regional property tax bill. For a typical household with current value assessment of \$350,000 this equates to an increase of \$18.76 for 2011.”

The last time we checked, policing was a regional service and therefore should have been rolled in with the rest of the regional programs and services budget figure.

Could it be that last year’s promise of another regional tax freeze had driven regional officials to not only separate policing from the rest of the regional programs and services budget, but then bury it halfway down its press release?

Did they think no one would notice?

Wait, it gets even worse.

Regional council also approved a combined water/wastewater budget rate hike of 4.1 per cent for Halton residents and businesses, meaning that a typical household using 300 cubic metres of water per year could expect to pay \$31.10 more than last year.

While water/wastewater rates aren’t technically part of a Halton resident’s tax bill, they do impact every resident’s household budget.

While no one expects Halton Region to keep tax hikes frozen forever, such misleading tactics can only lead to feelings of mistrust.

### Letters to the editor policy

Letters must include an address and daytime telephone number. Anonymous letters will not be published. Letters should not exceed 150 words and may be edited for content and/or length. Publication is not guaranteed.

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### WEB POLL RESULTS

In the wake of the recent snowstorm how do you feel local works crews performed?

- The crews did a top-notch job (63%)
- The crews did a lousy job (9%)
- The crews did an okay job, but it could have been better (28%)

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## Letters to the editor

### Our hospital is also for 'outsiders'

Dear editor,

I would like to say that I do not understand the thought of “this is our hospital, not for people from Brampton”.

In the last six years my husband, my daughter and myself have all had to go to Brampton for emergency medical treatment, after having been referred there from Georgetown’s ER.

My husband’s life depended on the CT scan that was available in Brampton. There was no question of what town we were from and wouldn’t that have caused an uproar if we were turned away from Brampton’s hospital because we were outsiders, especially as his critical case bumped patients that were already scheduled for the scanner.

In both my daughter’s and my cases, we needed the fracture clinics that were available at the Brampton hospital and my daughter was the first of all her friends to be able to “check-in” to Brampton’s new hospital.

I call shame on each and every

person who feels that the “outsiders” of Brampton don’t deserve the same access to health care that we expect. We are truly lucky to be able to live in a small town area, with access to the larger hospitals within minutes. Let’s not diminish our small town with small minds.

As for paying the taxes necessary to bring a CT scanner to Georgetown, I for one am pleased to do so.

Megan Golden, Acton

### Locals patients should take precedence

Dear editor,

I completely agree with Matt Penny (Feb. 1 letter re: hospital funding).

Nothing is more frustrating than having a child who is in pain, and having to wait an extended amount of time to see a doctor at our ER because you’re in line behind people from Brampton or Mississauga.

In my opinion, if a patient from Halton Hills has had their medical condition assessed in triage as an ‘equal’ emergency to someone from out of town, the Halton Hills patient should take precedence in our local hospital, rather than a first-come-first-serve scenario.

Leslie Salisbury, Halton Hills

### Preventing tragedies

Dear editor,

Re: Why gay-straight alliance groups? It’s not about gay rights. It’s about preventing suicide.

The explosion in the numbers of gay teenagers committing suicide has sounded alarm bells over the last year. To combat this growing and tragic epidemic, communities and school boards have made efforts to shore up the acceptance of individual differences, and allow the formation of gay-straight alliance groups in schools where gay students can go and won’t be tormented.

Youths can be cruel enough to each other without additional incentive from their school. An overt publicized ‘ban’ on this alliance group promotes a further rejection of a vulnerable minority of teenagers. It sends out the message that: the school does not approve of gay and straight students being friends or even supporting each other. And it encourages their further marginalization.

It becomes in students’ minds, an implicit justification and endorsement for increased denunciation and bullying, the result being all too often, escape into drugs or suicide.

D. S. Barclay, Georgetown