

## Bill 8 will drive accountability

Pat Vanini, executive director of The Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) doesn't like the ombudsman's right to oversee closed meetings on local councils.

Other municipalities don't like it either.

These are the same people that turned private in-camera meetings into an art form. Or conducted sly votes to give themselves pay raises. Or ran on a platform of transparency in an effort to get elected, and then did the opposite.

The costs of all this nocturnal governing in Ontario are probably incalculable.

Vanini couldn't help but respond to a news conference held at Queen's Park recently, unveiling the acting ombudsman's (Barbara Finlay) plan to investigate complaints. Bill 8 came into law on Jan. 1.

Said Vanini: "Our experience is that the Office of Ontario's ombudsman has, at times, disrespected municipal government."

We think the opposite. Many municipal governments disrespect the taxpayers.

Finlay said her office had to turn away literally thousands of complaints. She said 16 "illegal" closed meetings were conducted last year— plus seven more since then. That doesn't include any complaints from some of Ontario's large cities.

These cities exercised their option to use other means of determining whether meetings held out of public view— allowed only in certain circumstances— were actually legal. Or they opted for an individual private investigator or to use the services of the organization set up by the AMO.

Finlay said these cities engaged in oversight shopping— picking out people to police them.

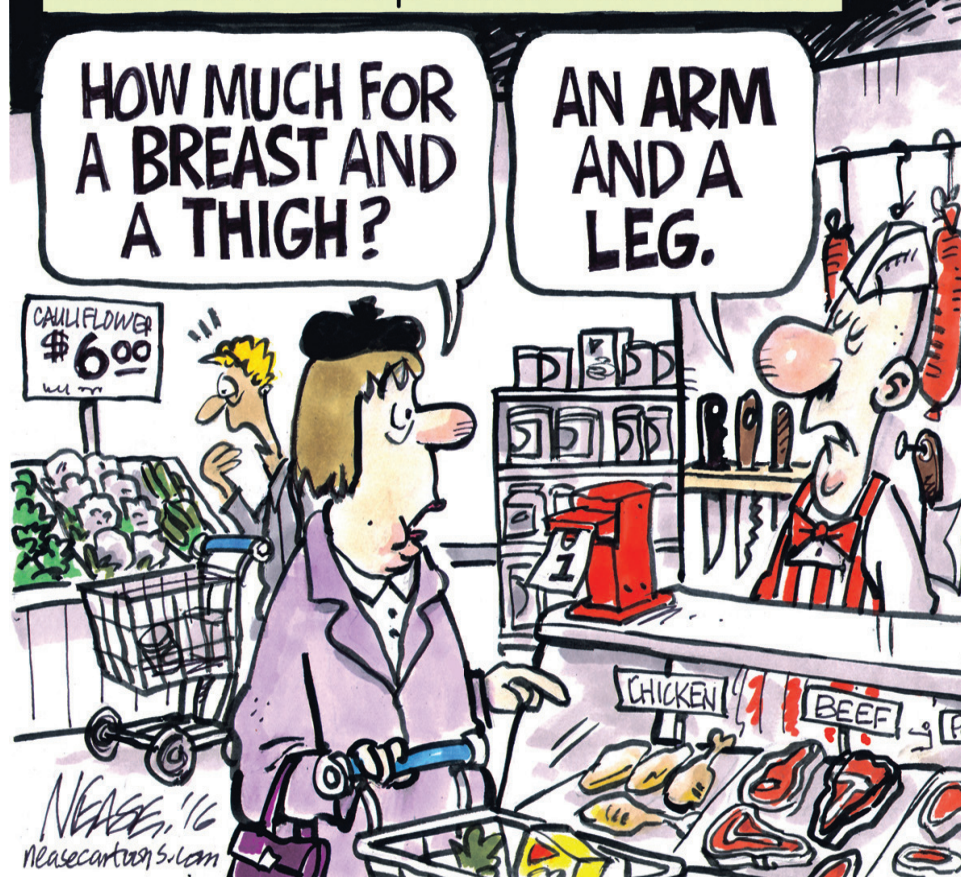
How did that work in Mississauga's northern neighbour, for example?

The bottom line is this: Bill 8 (providing sweeping new investigative powers to watchdogs in the ombudsman's office) was passed for a reason. The reason is: we don't trust cities or towns to police themselves. It's clear that we need an ombudsman's office with teeth, and powers to prosecute. We desperately need accountability at the local level.

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News Item: Food prices continue to rise...



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## Letters to the editor

### Artists, Red Door deserved better

Re: Red Door Gallery and Legion Branch No. 120.

I do not have any association with the Legion Branch No. 120 or the Red Door Gallery.

I am a concerned taxpayer who is a contributing Downtown Georgetown BIA member and was on the BIA board during the process of developing the Trillium grant to the Legion Branch No. 120, mainly as a vehicle to house the Red Door gallery and improve our town.

A BIA member, also a Legion member, helped to broker the unique Trillium grant that would provide our local artists a facility to showcase their works, improve the downtown area to attract more visitors, while allowing the Legion to gain needed improvements to their facility.

Through grant monies from the Ontario Trillium Foundation (\$132,000), Town of Halton Hills Municipal Assistant program (\$3,000 for canopies) and the

BIA Façade Improvement program, (\$3,700 – for painting of building exterior, canopy and signage) the Legion was able to turn an unused, unkept annex into a bright, clean (rentable) space.

The community partners agreed to support the Legion Branch No. 120 because there was a verbal agreement for a three-year community gallery.

There is documentation to support a three-year rental period with pre-arranged values up to a maximum amount for year three.

From the get-go, it appears the Legion, upon completing the renovations turned against the gallery and the BIA.

An audit by the Trillium administrators will find all facts supporting the BIA and the Red door Gallery vs. Legion to be available and documented in writing. The Trillium grant and agreements are public as well.

I understand the Legion Branch No. 120 does not pay property taxes or contribute to the BIA levy.

Unfortunately I do.

Since the Legion Branch No. 120 wants to rent the Red Gallery space to the open market then they should pay back \$138,700 of taxpayers' money.

The Red Door Gallery and local artists are now looking for a home; \$138,000 could go a long way in helping them and many others in our town.

S. Leachman,  
Halton Hills

### Don't let fear win

RE: We must remain vigilant for ISIS, Letters, Dec. 31.

Jean Martin's letter that we remain vigilant is a prudent idea but as I read the letter it became clear that it was more a reflection of fear than prudence. If Ms. Martin had done a little more research she would have found news organizations such as the BBC are questioning the validity of the poll. How do you conduct a valid, fair, honest poll in war-torn Syria? Do you honestly expect the polling company sent representatives to walk around a war zone asking people how they feel about ISIS? I'm actually surprised that 78 per cent of people indicated that the "Islamic State are a strongly negative influence".

This means 4 out of 5 Syrians polled are against ISIS. Voicing that opinion seems to be a great way to get killed.

Dan Harmer,  
Georgetown