

IF YOU THINK FORD'S CUTS SO FAR ARE BAD, GET READY ...

Municipal governments across Ontario are feeling caught between a rock and a hard place by the Ford government's announcement that it will provide \$7.35 million for freelance auditors to review spending and find efficiencies.

Aside from the natural suspicion about provincial meddling in local government, there's the justifiable fear that Ford's team of auditors will be programmed to follow his government's partisan ideological bias, in which case they'll be recommending even deeper service cuts, privatization and who knows what else.

The truth is most municipal governments already do value for service audits, so this will be duplication. But that doesn't mean there will be no efficiencies found, which brings us to the hard place.

If mayors and councils don't demonstrate openness and willingness to take part in the audits, they'll be perceived as not being welcoming to savings opportunities. That's not a good look for local elected officials caught between Queen's Park and anxious taxpayers.

That anxiety is not misplaced. Ford's government has already made deep cuts to municipalities, legal aid, tree planting, flood prevention, artificial intelligence and health research, public health units and emergency and policing services. And according to Ontario's independent Financial Accountability Officer, Peter Weltman, Ford will need to find another \$6 billion in savings in order to balance the budget on schedule and deliver promised tax cuts.

Green Leader Mike Schreiner put it succinctly: "If you think that people are upset about the cuts the Ford government's already made ... they're going to be especially upset when another \$6 billion of unannounced cuts happen over the next three years."

And the anxiety isn't just about the draconian nature of the cuts. Increasingly, they also appear to be poorly planned with little or no understanding of the impact on citizens.

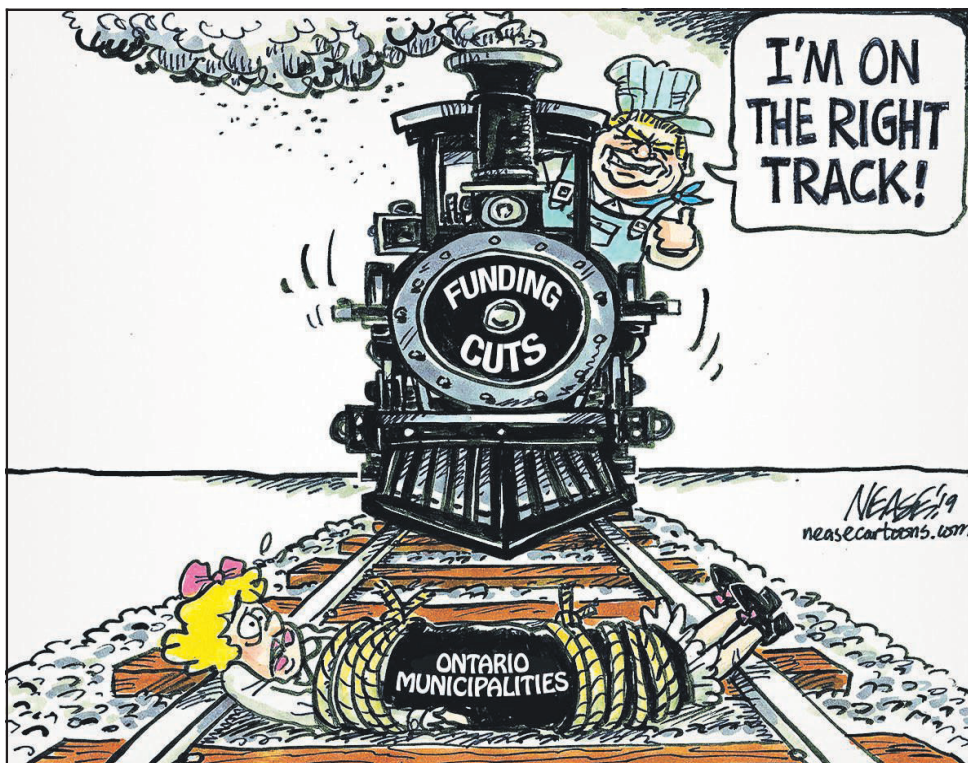
For example, the government is ending all out-of-country medical coverage as of Oct. 1. That will mean, among other things, that people who rely on regular dialysis to cleanse their blood due to malfunctioning kidneys will not be able to leave the province.

According to Health Minister Christine Elliott, this didn't occur to her ministry as it planned cuts. Now they're scrambling to put patches in place to address that and other problems not foreseen due to haste and poor planning.

If that single anecdote doesn't fill you with confidence, you're in good company. What other impacts has the government not foreseen?

It seems we're dealing with a government that doesn't consult, doesn't listen to what it hears when it does and isn't overly concerned about collateral damage. That's legitimate reason for anxiety.

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LETTERS & COMMENTARY

HALTON HILLS NEEDS BYLAWS TO PROTECT TREES

An open letter to the mayor of Halton Hills and council:

The Town of Halton Hills has unanimously declared a climate emergency.

As reported in the IFP, the resolution was championed by Jane Fogal. "Climate change is real, it is happening and we all have a responsibility to do what we can do," Fogal said. "It is incumbent upon us as leaders in the community to enact change via policies and practices to lower our carbon emissions."

Trees are an integral part of combating climate change. We have the mayor's green plan as a guideline that speaks to the tree canopy in Halton Hills, although no one can specify its extent when asked.

We have seen many large, healthy, mature trees being cut down in our neighbourhoods; trees that are in many cases older than those ordering and completing their removal.

The Town of Halton Hills is the only town/city

in Halton Region without a municipal bylaw to protect the mature healthy trees that we are seeing being taken down. Other than the Halton Region bylaw protecting woodlots, the Town of Halton Hills has none.

Passing a climate resolution is fine, but is there a will to act in a responsible manner to protect the trees that are beneficial and vital to our existence?

GINGER QUINN,

HALTON HILLS

RECONCILIATION BILL LONG OVERDUE

With the clock running out on the current session of Parliament, I'm paying close attention to whether the Senate passes a long-overdue bill on reconciliation.

Bill C-262 was approved by the House of Commons last year, but the review process in the Senate is taking a very long time.

What the bill does is set out a framework for the federal government to work with First Nations, Inuit and Métis people to implement standards set

out in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

It's a goal that's been supported by politicians of all political stripes, but there's still a danger that Bill C-262 could remain stalled in the Senate. That's why I think we should all be following this story and asking our political leaders and all senators to do the right thing.

Passage of Bill C-262 would set a positive example for the rest of the world in implementing concrete, practical ways forward for reconciliation.

It would be wonderful for all of us in Canada for Bill C-262 to be passed before this session of Parliament ends — reconciliation is too important for an opportunity like this to be wasted.

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GEORGETOWN

YOU OPINIONS

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