

FORD SHOULD LEARN TO MEASURE TWICE, CUT ONLY ONCE

There was broad agreement across Ontario that Doug Ford blundered big-time when he retroactively slashed funding for the province's municipalities this spring.

Thank goodness the premier himself belatedly agrees - even if his enlightenment resulted from an unprecedented free fall in public approval.

Suddenly cutting hundreds of millions of dollars in provincial support to municipal governments for child care, public health and paramedic services after those governments had passed their budgets for the coming year was always a terrible decision, an outrage in fact.

It was unfair to the municipalities who were left scrambling to find the money they needed through tax or fee hikes or, alternatively, through service cuts. It was a shock to everyone who relies on those vital services and was left worrying whether the health and safety of themselves and their families would be compromised. And they might well have been.

It was, to be blunt, a precipitous, ill-considered, dangerous move that brought a well-deserved firestorm of public criticism raining down on Ford's head.

Whatever else can be said about the man's poor judgment, at least he listened and reversed course. Provincial funding levels for the municipalities to provide child care, public health and paramedic services will go untouched. For this year at least.

That doesn't mean Ford won't put municipal grants back on his chopping block before the 2020-2021 municipal budgets are passed. But it means local governments can prepare themselves for change even as they muster support to push back against future cuts.

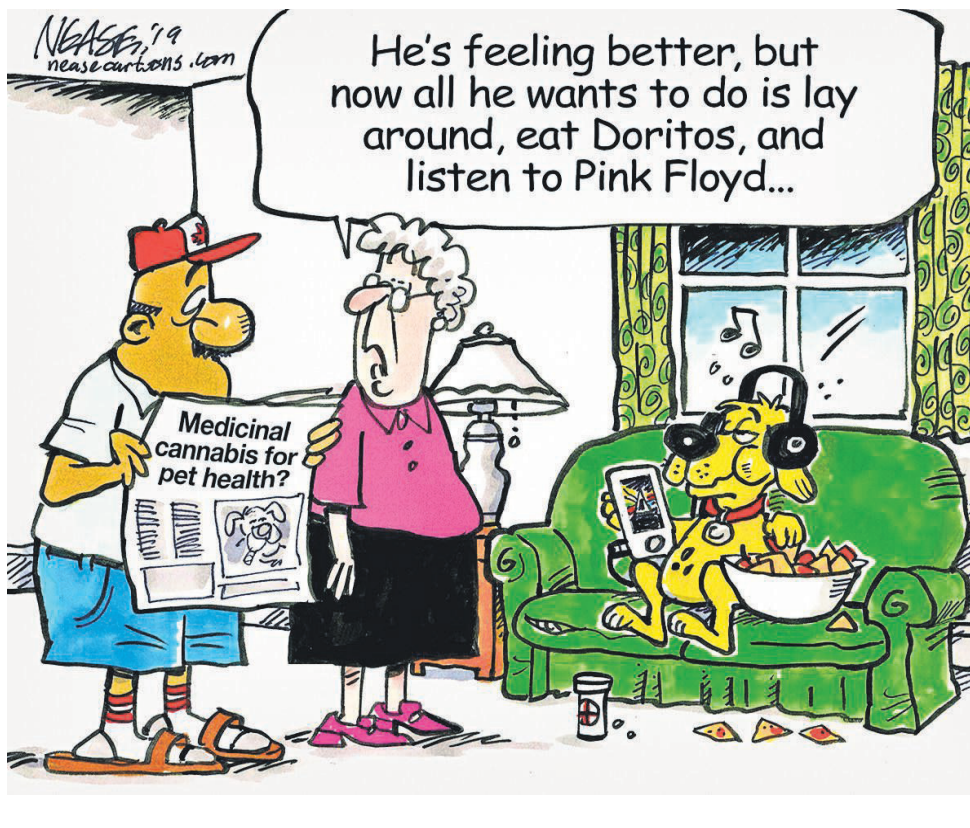
If there's a silver lining in the black cloud that's been spreading over the province from Queen's Park, it's that a groundswell of opposition, not only from municipal politicians but the public, persuaded Ford to cancel the cuts. Elected municipal officials from across the province banded together and spoke as one voice. They didn't merely oppose. They co-operated with each other and it worked.

Meanwhile, a poll released by Mainstreet Research recently reported a huge drop in public support for Ford's Progressive Conservatives as they approached their first anniversary in office. As for Ford's personal net favorability rating, it had plunged to a catastrophic -53.5 per cent. That's even lower than former Liberal premier Kathleen Wynne's rating before she led her party to electoral disaster. Ford insists he wasn't spooked by the dismal polling numbers, but rather he listened to the people of Ontario. Let's hope his hearing grows more acute.

His government is, in fact, absolutely right to want to stop spending more money than it takes in each year and to avoid piling new debt on a provincial debt that has topped \$343 billion and costs taxpayers more than \$1 billion a month simply in interest charges.

Putting Ontario's financial house in order must be a priority. But Ford should be less adversarial and more consultative. He should realize haste does mean waste and proceed with more caution. Ontarians shouldn't feel he's leading them over a cliff.

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THE FINANCIAL PRESSURES OF THE SINGLE MOTHER

THOSE WHO CARE FOR OUR CHILDREN ARE FACING MORE BARRIERS, WRITES SABIHUDDIN



SARAH SABIHUDDIN
 Column

"I cannot afford to put my child somewhere safe during the day in order to work outside of the home to provide economically for my family. Providing a safe environment and good-quality child care for my child is not an option for me due to the high cost of child care in our community."

For a single mother living in Halton, the child-care cost for one infant can consume as much as 44 per cent of their median

after-tax income because the average infant spot costs approximately \$1,500 monthly. This would leave almost no financial flexibility for other essential items such as housing, utilities, food, clothing and other basic necessities.

Ironically, those who care for our children are facing more barriers. Across Canada, 97 per cent of child caregivers are women and one in four require a second job to make ends meet.

Early childhood educators earn 40 per cent less on average than women with similar levels of education working full-time in other sectors.

Making accessible, affordable, high-quality early learning and child care available to all families across Canada will grow the economy, promote gender equality, increase women's labour force par-

ticipation and enhance children's well-being and educational achievement.

The benefits of a universal, affordable, child care plan supported and funded by all levels of government would have a positive impact on our society and economy.

The safety, well-being and quality of care of our children should be a topic that all political parties can get behind and support. The future of our society and economy depends on it.

Sarah Sabihuddin is senior manager of community impact for United Way Halton and Hamilton.

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