

ONTARIO FINALLY FIXING OUR BROKEN CANNABIS SYSTEM

The Ontario government will be doing something it should have done a long time ago. It will scrap the province's controversial and infamously slow legal marijuana licensing and retail system in favour of one that will allow a lot more retail outlets to open and quickly. Why it took this long is a mystery.

The Ford government is notorious for moving slowly on files that need immediate fixes and recklessly on ones that call for a thoughtful approach. And the cannabis distribution file has been in need of attention for a long time.

Consider that Alberta, with a population of 4.4 million, has 254 cannabis stores. That figure for Alberta was from August of last year. Since then the provincial regulator has been approving stores at the rate of 20 or so per month. Now, consider that Ontario, with a population of 14.5 million, has - wait for it - 25 retail outlets (more have been approved but are not up and running yet.)

Having an adequate supply of cannabis retail outlets is not frivolous. A major part of the rationale for legalization is to dramatically reduce or even eliminate the black market for pot. Obviously, that cannot happen if there isn't adequate access to a legal supply. Which is why, in Ontario especially, the black market continues to thrive.

Another key reason for legalization is consumer safety. Legal, regulated cannabis can be controlled at the source, ensuring more harmful ingredients are not added in processing.

So Ontario is lagging most of the rest of Canada. Not only that, it's losing money. That's right. The old saying about how the government can screw up just about anything has a new twist with news that the Ontario Cannabis Retail Corp. (the Crown corporation charged with overseeing the market) lost \$42 million for the year that ended March 31.

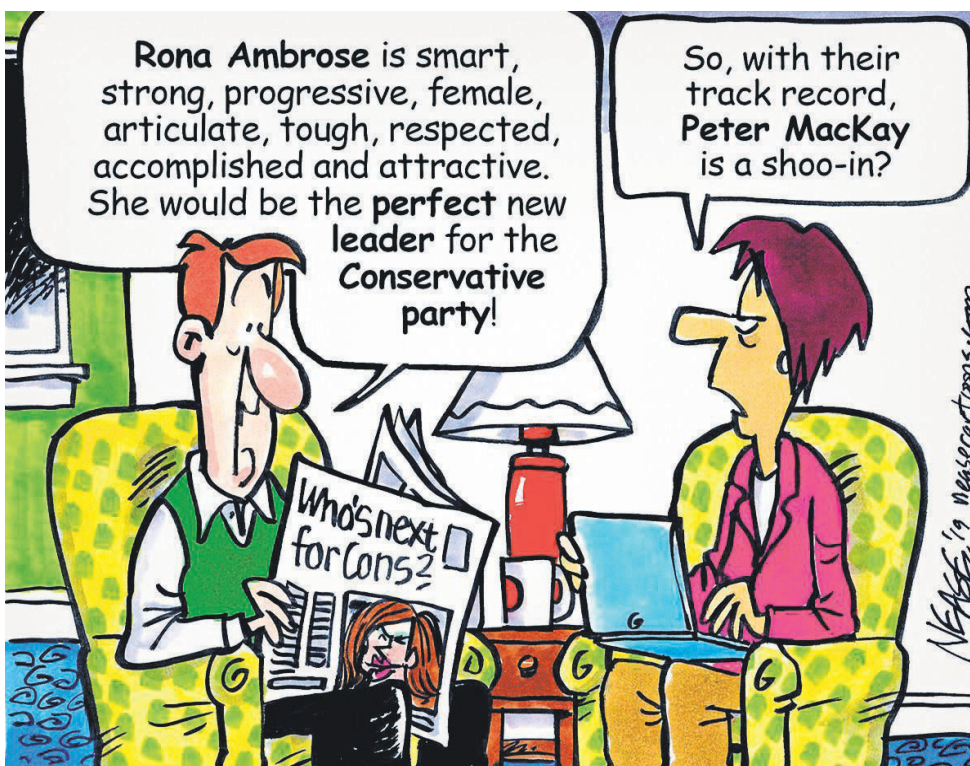
The corporation says that loss isn't systemic, but was due to "considerable foundational investments." Maybe. But it's worth noting that New Brunswick, which lost \$12 million in the first six months of last year on selling cannabis, is in the midst of privatizing the province's distribution system that was previously under the wing of a Crown corporation.

In any case, Ontario isn't looking at full privatization, but only at dramatically increased distribution capacity. Announcing the changes, Attorney General Doug Downey said retail authorization applications will be accepted beginning in March of this year.

Store authorizations will start being issued in April, at a rate of about 20 per month - the same pace being set by Alberta.

If all that goes according to plan, there could be close to 250 stores across Ontario by the end of 2020. That's still an inadequate supply given the size of Ontario's market, but it's a big improvement and is trending in the right direction.

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OUR WANDERING MAGNETIC NORTH POLE

IT'S MOVING MORE THAN YOU MAY THINK, WRITES MARIO CARR



MARIO
 CARR
 Column

If you think the magnetic North Pole is stationary, you're in for a surprise.

Since 1831, the North Pole has been moving 2,250 kilometres. It's also moving away from Canada to Siberia.

That's the recent prediction by the World Magnetic Model 2020.

For the past 20 years, the magnetic North Pole has been moving at an average speed of 55 kilometres per year, but has been slowing to 40 kilometres per year.

It's not entirely clear why it's moving but every five years the World Magnetic Model monitors its change.

The model helps organizations that depend on accurate readings.

A wandering pole affects surveying and mapping, satellite/antenna tracking, navigation and

air traffic management. Earth's magnetic poles are created by the flow of iron in the centre of our planet. The magnetic field creates the northern lights and protects us from harmful cosmic radiation. Without this protective envelope, life wouldn't be possible.

Here are January stargazing events, which are listed in the Hamilton Amateur Astronomers calendar.

Jan. 5 - Earth at perihelion and closest to the Sun for the entire year.

Jan. 10 - Hamilton Amateur Astronomers meeting at McMaster Innovation Park, 175 Longwood Rd. S., Hamilton from 7:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m.

Free admission, door prizes and everybody welcome.

An optional food bank donation of non-perishable goods is collected and appreciated.

Jan. 19 - Mars is close to the moon at sunrise.

Jan. 22 - Jupiter is close to the moon at sunrise. Jan. 27 - Venus is extremely close to Neptune at dusk.

Jan. 28 - Venus is close to the evening crescent moon.

For more information, see the Hamilton Amateur Astronomers website at www.amateurastronomy.org or call 905-627-4323.

The club offers a basic astronomy course for members.

Mario Carr is the club's director of publicity and can be reached at mario-carr@cogeco.ca. Twitter: @MarioCCarr

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