

Editorial

It's just wrong!

There comes a point when civil liberties must take a back seat to common sense and the welfare of children.

The Dillman case of Alberta is just such a case.

Dr. John Schneeberger has been in prison since 1999 after being sentenced to six years for drugging and raping a 22 year-old patient and doing the same to his then-teen step-daughter, who is now 20.

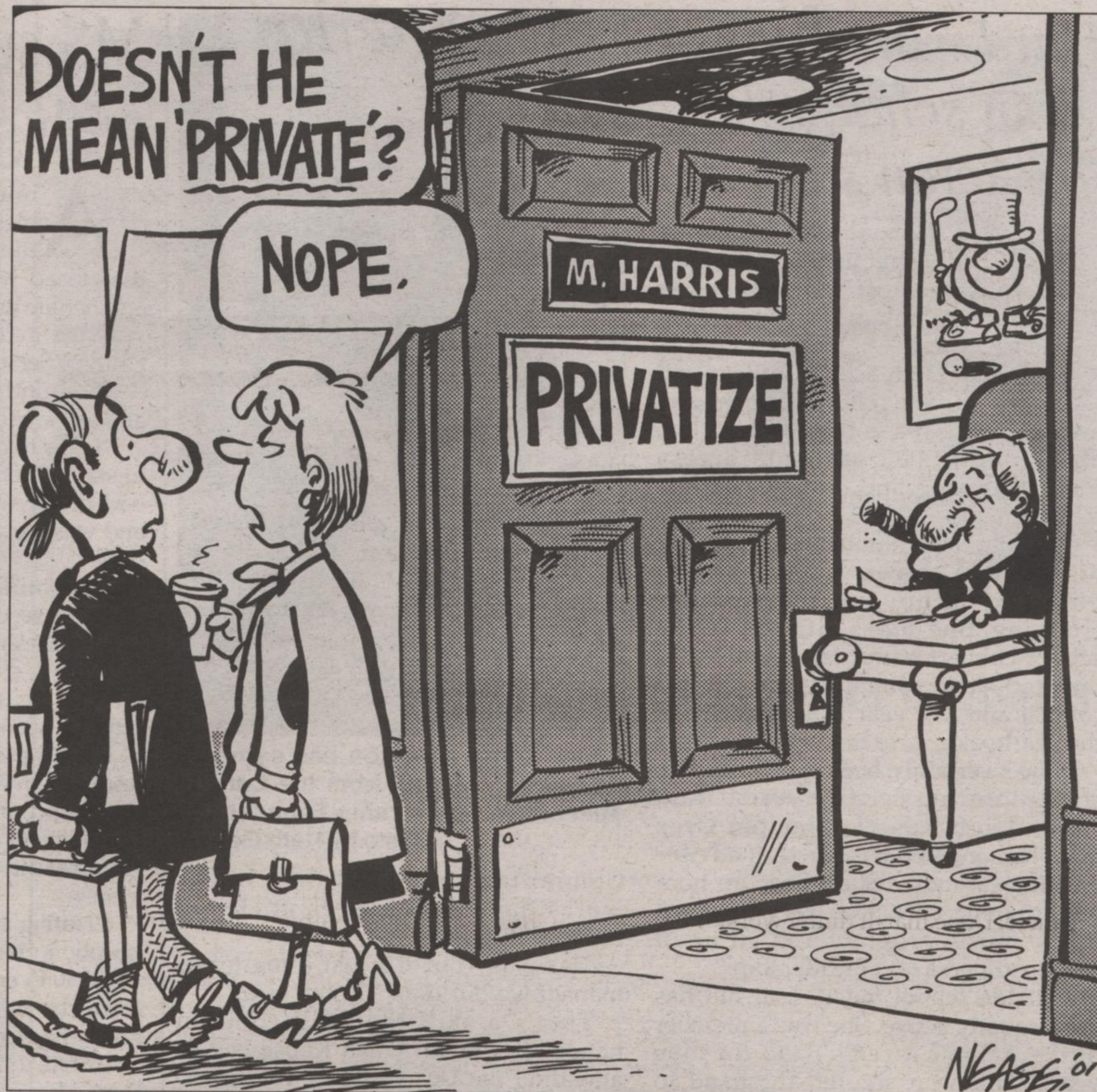
Schneeberger's ex-wife, Lisa Dillman, lost a legal challenge of a Saskatchewan judge's visitation order and was forced to take her two daughters, aged five and six, to see their father— Schneeberger— in an Alberta penitentiary.

Imagine, in this country, a mother is being forced to take her young children to visit a convicted sex offender who has already assaulted another of his offspring.

And to make matters worse, federal Justice Minister Anne McLellan has virtually ignored the matter. She has shown no willingness to review the case, propose an amendment to the Criminal Code, or at the very least, offer words of encouragement to Dillman. Her response has been to tell Dillman to appeal the Saskatchewan decision.

The bottom line is, five and six-year olds shouldn't be forced to visit a pervert in jail.

What is so difficult to understand about that?



Letters to the editor....

Tax credits a step towards privatization, says school board chair

(The following is an open letter to Ontario Premier Mike Harris which was made available for publication.)

Dear Mr. Premier:

For the past several years, public school boards and the residents of Ontario have been subjected to government action and rhetoric which we feel are designed to discredit and devalue public education in Ontario. We believe the tax credit proposed for parents who

remove students from the public system is a huge step toward the privatization of public education and the erosion of a strong, proven education system.

The following comments specifically address our concerns about the implementation of the tax credit legislation:

The \$300 million estimated to finance the tax credit for next year would be better spent to strengthen our already under-funded public education system. Should the enrolment in private schools double due to your inviting proposal, \$600 million would not be available to public boards of education.

The tax credit will create a two-tier education system, further segregating students based on religion, ethnic background and wealth. Students with behavioural difficulties, academic problems and physical challenges will not meet the criteria for admission to private schools.

The tax credit creates an obvious Ontario government double standard plan. Private schools will not be held to the same standards as public schools, namely:

- Implementation of the new rigorous curriculum
- Safe schools requirements including criminal checks
- Provincial report cards and EQAO standardized testing
- Teacher certification from the Ontario College of Teachers
- Teacher testing
- Creation of school councils to enable active parent participation
- The use of textbooks approved by the Ministry
- The legislative requirement to not incur a deficit.

Mr. Premier, on more than one occasion you have stated that your government is committed to a strong public education system in Ontario. You have also stated that you would not support a voucher system or charter schools in the Province of Ontario. I would like to point out that the poorly disguised voucher system you propose through the tax credit scheme will do absolutely nothing to strengthen public education. Diverting money from public schools, where special education programs have been deci-

mated, where textbooks are in short supply, where transportation costs far exceed the funding envelope, and where critical Junior and Senior Kindergarten programs are not fully funded, will do absolutely nothing to strengthen public education.

On behalf of the Halton District School Board, I call on you, Premier Harris, to hold public hearings on the legislation to implement the tax credit/voucher system. The public absolutely must have an opportunity to respond to this latest sudden, dramatic attack on public education, and indeed on the democratic principles upon which our public education system was built.

We strongly believe you have been given no mandate by the people of Ontario to implement this tax credit since it was never a part of your election strategy or campaign. Within clear equity of access parameters, there should be immediate and extensive public hearings on such a major shift in public policy.

Ethel Gardiner, Chair
Halton District School Board

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All letters must be signed and include an address and a daytime telephone number. Letters requesting names be withheld will only be published pending a valid reason at the editor's discretion. Letters should be not exceed 300 words and may be edited for content or length.

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