

# More cash going to Durham than Halton Region strongly opposed to GTA pooling program

Halton taxpayers are supporting social programs outside of the region more than their own, and that's not right, regional council says.

Regional councillors threw their unanimous support behind a motion Wednesday expressing its strong opposition to the Greater Toronto Area pooling program and directed staff to investigate the possibility of a Halton, Hamilton and Niagara pooling system.

Under the province's Local Service Realignment program, communities across the GTA combine their costs for social assistance and social housing. That total cost is then tallied and proportioned between the regions of Halton, Durham, Peel, York and the City of Toronto based on property tax weighting.

Last year Halton taxpayers contributed nearly \$40 million to social housing and social assistance programs in other GTA municipalities compared to \$21 million Halton spent on its own social programs.

Burlington Councillor John Taylor said Halton is sending out \$2 to the pool for every \$1 it can afford to spend on Halton social programs.

"I think there's something wrong with the formula if it is two for one," said Halton Hills Regional Councillor John Day. "If we're going to pool, let's do it wisely, but let's not leave Halton short, so we can address our own social programs."

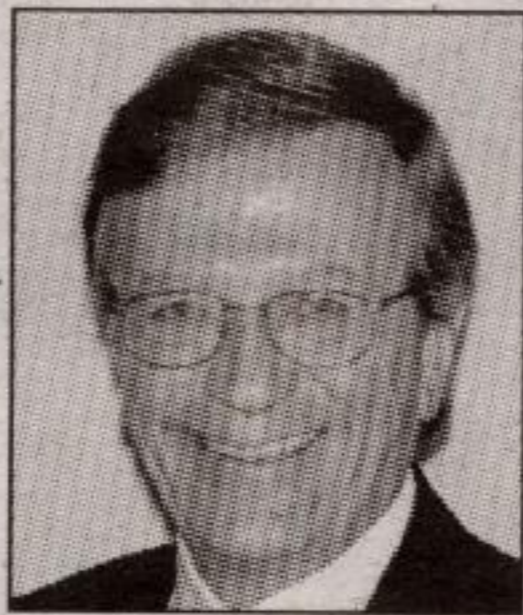
"It's not fair because its impacting our own budget in the region as far as the services that we're able to manage to afford," said Halton Hills Mayor Kathy Gastle. "So let's re-evaluate it with the province."

"This system doesn't make sense. This system shouldn't be, but if the province insists on having it, let's re-tool it," said Burlington Mayor Rob MacIssac.

He said these services shouldn't be on the property tax base.

Because of the weighting system— which uses an average weighting, not the actual weighting used by municipalities to collect property taxes— Halton last year spent \$21 million on its social assistance and social housing programs.

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JOHN DAY

In that same time, Halton taxpayers contributed a further \$39.5 million to social programs in other GTA municipalities.

"The people in Toronto and Durham spend less on their programs than we do. That's not right," said Taylor.

"How do you help someone out and they end up better off than you?"

The City of Hamilton has also asked the province to be included in the pooling program. If that were to happen, Hamilton would see the most benefit and pay the least, says a regional staff report.

"The inclusion of the City of Hamilton into the GTA pooling results in savings to the City of Hamilton and an increase in the contribution required by the regions of Halton, Peel and York," the report states.

"It also results in a reduction in the benefits to the City of Toronto."

Under the approved motion, regional staff will investigate the possibility of pooling with Hamilton and Niagara, and report back to council with a series of options.

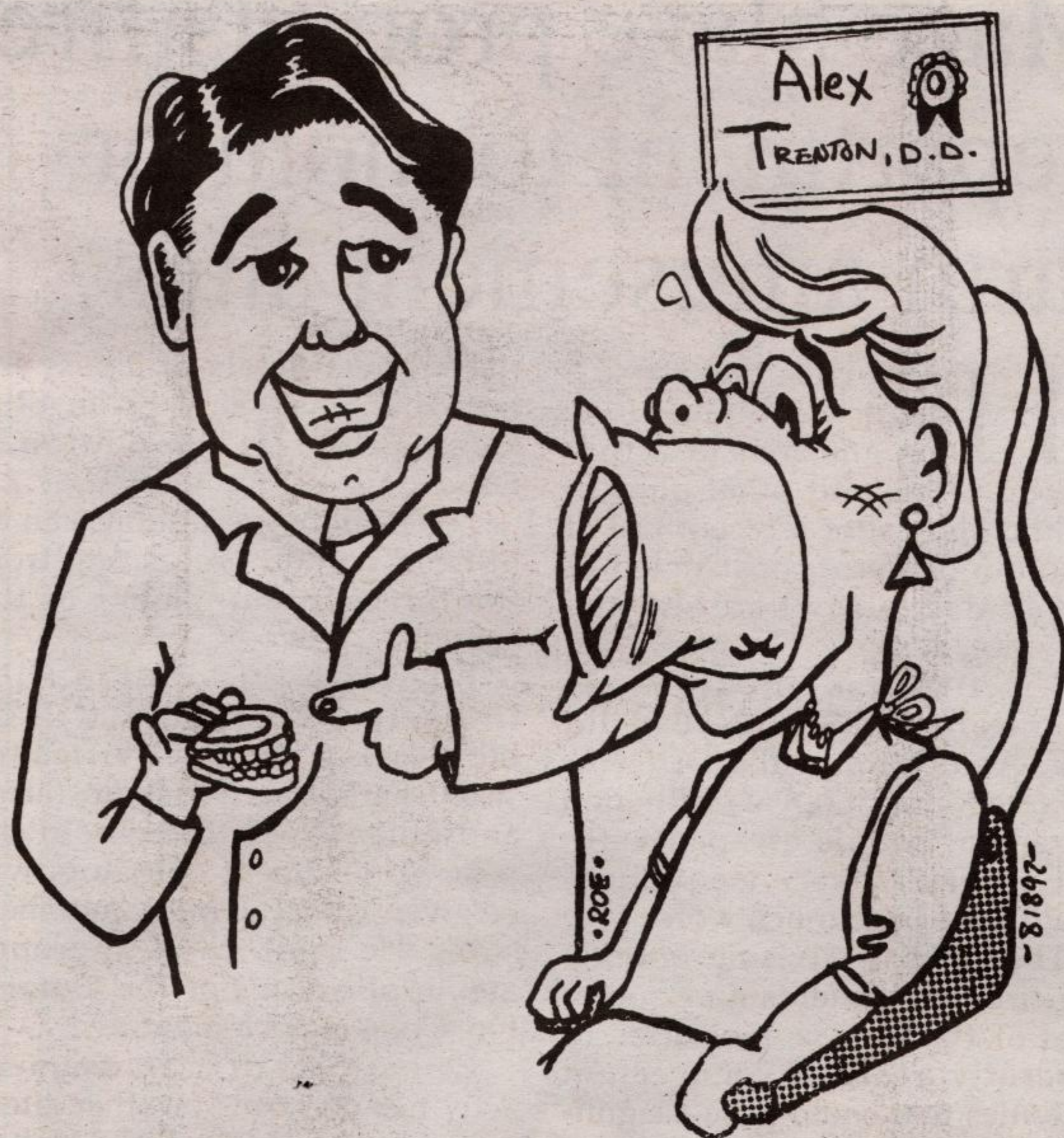
The motion also states pooling options must not negatively impact Halton taxpayers.

Gastle however, doesn't believe, as elected officials, regional council should be looking at pooling at all.

"We should be looking at not pooling because of the impacts," said Gastle.

Upon receipt of a staff report outlining Halton's pooling options, Regional Chair Joyce Savoline will meet with area MPPs to discuss the issue.

—By Richard Vivian, special, with files from Lisa Tallyn, staff writer



Alex suggests a comfortable cushion insert for problem lower dentures!

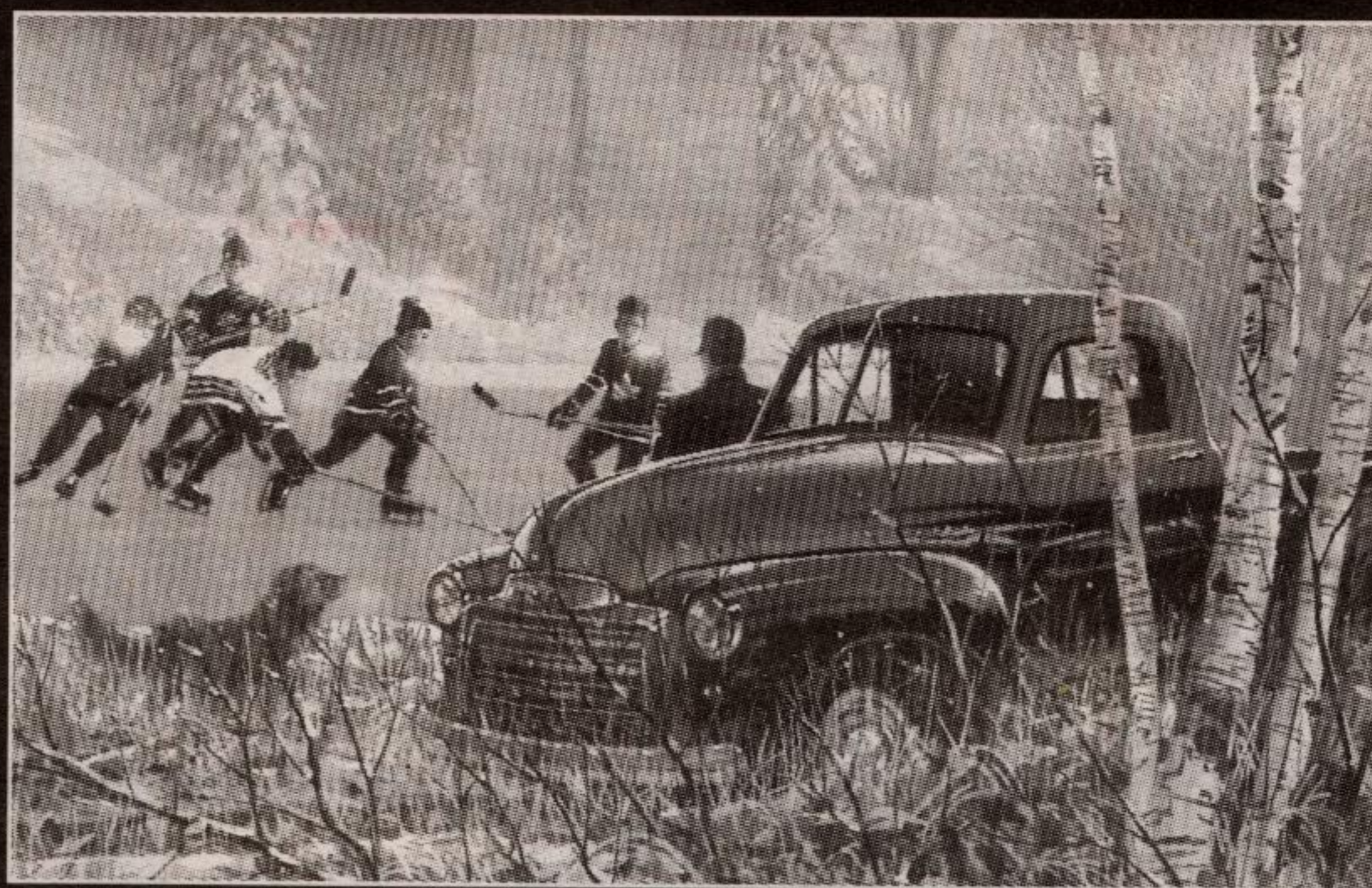
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