

OPINION

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Let there be light

Recently the Ontario Legislature passed Bill 130 which made sweeping changes to the way municipalities operate by giving them new powers and responsibilities. It also gave the citizens of Ontario a power they've never had before; a method to challenge the legality of a closed-door council meeting.

While this is an excellent first step, it does have some major shortcomings. For one it only deals with municipal councils and their committees—no hospital boards, school boards, police services boards, library boards etc. These public institutions, which have a huge impact on the lives of people either operate under rules which allow them to exclude anyone they want from meetings for any reason, or offer the public no way to challenge the decisions of these groups.

Although Bill 130 allows us to challenge a decision, it offers no consequences for a council that breaks the law other than a public report that confirms it.

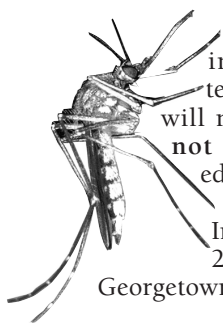
To address these concerns Niagara Falls MPP Kim Craitor has introduced a Private Member's Bill, the Transparency in Public Matters Act, that would force meetings of these bodies (as well as municipalities) to be open to the public and would allow citizens to stand up for their right to access how decisions are made. Like Bill 130 it gives the public the right to challenge the closure of a public meeting; but unlike Bill 130 it allows the Information and Privacy Commissioner to disallow any decisions taken during an improperly held secret meeting. It also standardizes the list of reasons the public could legitimately be kept from the process, which is important given the hodge-podge of regulations that currently apply.

People, who are interested in being involved in the decisions that shape their communities, get frustrated when they are stonewalled by the very organizations created to work on their behalf. The Transparency in Public Matters Act goes a long way towards improving the situation but without the support of concerned and involved citizens, the Private Member's Bill may die.

Its death would continue the disenchantment with our political process which will only lead to greater public sector secrecy and further alienate people from those who supposedly work on our behalf.

Something bugging you?

Send us a letter!



Letters to the editor must include an address and daytime telephone number. Unsigned letters will not be published. Letters should not exceed 200 words and may be edited for content and/or length.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

It's too late to avoid damage to our planet

Dear editor,

Thank you for your excellent editorial on climate change (Jan. 17). There is no real debate on this subject.

As part of the Energy Star community, and working for the Canadian government's Energy Star Manufacturer of the Year, I have seen data that is even stronger than Al Gore's excellent documentary.

There are two groups of people who will deny its reality for some very interesting reasons. The first are the "you say white, I say black" people.

These are individuals who are simply wired to take the other side vociferously on any issue. They may be brilliant or stupid, but what they have in common is a need for attention by taking an argumentative position. They make great college debaters because they will argue just about anything. They show up in Internet discussions as "flamers" who serve up contrary ideas for the sole purpose of soliciting a response and the joy of stirring up trouble. I suspect that these folk are active in the climate change debate.

The second group is downright scary. These are the people who welcome the possibility of imminent Armageddon for religious reasons. If you believe that a judgement day is to be preceded by world-wide catastrophe, you certainly aren't going to do anything to stop it from happening in your lifetime!

Are there other reasons for being a climate change denier? The USSR often had policies of considering people with disagreeable views to be insane. I have to admit, I do wonder.

There may also be those who simply figure that the world will last long enough for them to have their piece of cake and eat it to, so let it go to hell in a handbasket after they die.

There are those who don't have or don't really understand the facts.

Are there sincere people who see the facts and simply don't believe we have enough information to make drastic changes to our way of life?

Extremely drastic changes are needed yesterday. It is too late to

avoid some serious damage to our planet and humanity. Even once everyone gets on board, the changes required are like trying to change the course of a very large ship. It has a wide turning radius and will need to continue to go forward (polluting) for years to come even with all world governments and peoples going into immediate crisis mode. I've never understood people who would speed in a fog because they had no reason to believe there was an on-coming car until seconds before the head-on collision.

There is too much to say...

Phil Lewin,
Glen Williams

Region incinerator a cause for concern

Dear editor,

Halton Region is pursuing the possibility of building one of the newer types of incinerator. Each type proposes heating mixed waste, extracting some energy and burying the leftovers.

This is a huge undertaking that could limit our options for the future. Before regional council makes its decision I'm hoping that the citizens of the region will take part in a discussion of the issues by writing in to the newspaper and sharing any letters written to our elected representatives.

Some of the things we need to examine are:

- 2) Cost: With estimates of \$750-\$800 million what will the taxpayer pay?
- 3) Energy loss
- 4) Climate change: Can we afford to put more CO2 in the atmosphere?
- 5) Alternatives: If we can create more jobs, use safer methods of waste reduction that make money for industry, should we burn these resources?

It's time to get involved.

Barbara Halsall
Protect Our Water and
Environmental Resources
(P.O.W.E.R.)
Halton Hills

1) Health effects