

OPINION

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Ballot box budget

Monday's budget announcement saw Jim Flaherty put on a demonstration that would have made the most adept tightrope walker proud.

As the finance minister dangled the carrot of increased federal spending, tax cuts and debt reduction in front of his political opponents, Gilles Duceppe of the Bloc Québécois took a bite— giving Stephen Harper's Conservative government all the support it needs to pass the budget and avoid a non-confidence vote.

We may find out how hungry Canadian voters were for this budget as early as this spring.

If the Conservatives have accurately gauged the mood of the electorate, this mix of provincial transfer payments, tax credits for working families and billions in equalization payments for Quebec will have provided the perfect prelude to a 2007 federal election.

Still, Flaherty sent some mixed messages on Monday— offering this ominous warning to news media during the budget day lockup:

"The day in Canada of governments with their hands out to other governments are passing," said Flaherty. "It's time for governments to be self-reliant and to be answerable to their own taxpayers, which is one of the benefits of fiscal balance."

Apparently Flaherty wasn't referring to this year— or next.

Federal transfer payments in the budget provide Ontario with \$2.33 billion over the next two years and give Quebec \$2.3 billion for 2007-08— assuming, of course, Harper's crew is returned if there's an election.

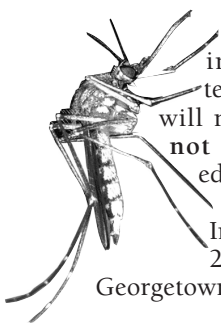
The increased transfer payment news is good for Ontario and will likely see Halton politicians continue to pressure Premier Dalton McGuinty to show them some infrastructure money to help the region cope with the next two decades of projected growth.

This was not a budget that targeted every Canadian. It was a budget that took dead aim at scoring strategic votes. It was about securing a future for Harper's party— both in the House of Commons and in the house of popular opinion.

This potent combination of a budget chock full of goodies and Harper's edge in popularity over Liberal leader Stéphane Dion should add up to an election call sooner than later.

Something bugging you?

Send us a letter!



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Steve Nease



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Cynical reader missed point of kind act

Dear editor,
RE: Mother was too trusting of stranger (March 9 letter).

It's regrettable that Mr. Penny has chosen only to see the 'bad' in people in entirely misconceiving the point of Mrs. Baker's submission.

When so often we read in the news only stories of sadness, and collectively worry over society's decay or moral descent, it was great to see that, not only do good things still happen, but little acts of kindness amongst neighbours, albeit strangers, still occur and don't go unnoticed. I am sure that was the motive behind her choosing to write in and share the story as a newer Halton Hills resident who only wanted to brighten people's day.

I should know— I am her husband.

At least Mr. Penny was candid enough to note off the top that he's a jaded fellow, as the content of his letter bears out in his imagining only the worst of all parties concerned. But it's unfortunate he was so personally malicious and shortsighted in casting aspersions about this woman's ability to parent, and put no thought into the harm his words might do when my wife put so much care into the submission she had penned.

But to balance his unpleasantness with some further kindness, I want to echo my wife's thanks to that pleasant elderly gentleman, who was so obviously both harmless and well-

intentioned, for that moment at the restaurant when one's faith is restored about the goodness that can and does exist in this world.

I certainly hope the next letter the cynical Mr. Penny deems to write is not some attack on poor Ms. Millie

Edmonds (re: "Driver's kindness was greatly appreciated"— March 9) who was generous enough to also share her warm tale of compassion and care in our community.

Ross Baker,
Acton

Students feeling pressure of tuition squeeze

Dear editor,
After reading the recent headline (March 2), *Cost of university education can increase in the coming years*, I became infuriated.

We live in a society where credentialism reigns, and an individual is subject to lose countless opportunities, based solely on the fact that they did not acquire a post-secondary diploma. Schools, parents and even the government all steer students towards obtaining a post-secondary degree, but are students being guided towards an inaccessible dream?

There is a considerable gap between students from low-income families, who are able to access Ontario Student Assistance Program, and high-income families, who can comfortably provide financial security for their child throughout their post-secondary career. Middle-income families are neglected, leaving students in this income range struggling to find a balance between working a part-time job and completing schoolwork.

The deregulation of tuition fees provides a pessimistic view of the future for prospective students, hin-

dering their capabilities, in an attempt to finance their tuition.

Chloe Beedham,
Georgetown District
High School student

Museum says, "Thanks"

Dear editor,
The Halton Museum Foundation would like to thank the performers, the staff of John Elliott Theatre, the volunteers and, of course, the public, who took time on Sunday, March 11 to support our current fundraising campaign, as we presented internationally-recognized illusionist Ted Outerbridge and Marion in *Magical Moments In Time*, part of their cross-Canada tour.

From giant clocks and disappearing performers, from the magic of mystical times to Zelda "the psychic chicken," the audience was held spell-bound as Mr. Outerbridge managed to bring out the child in all of us.

On behalf of the Halton Museum Foundation, thank-you for your continued support. www.halton.ca/museum

Ken Baker/HMF