

Two-armed bandits

Every day in Ontario millions of lottery tickets are purchased by customers with the clear understanding they are taking part in a game of chance and that the odds are stacked against them.

However, those players also hand over their money with the belief the lotteries are being run fairly.

While that belief had been shaken earlier this year by a CBC *the fifth estate* exposé that indicated an unusually high number of retailers—and this does not mean ALL retailers—had won large prizes, it was altogether shattered this week by Ombudsman André Marin's damning report on the Ontario Lottery and Gaming (OLG) Corporation.

Marin bluntly stated that the OLG developed a "corporate culture of profit" and basically abandoned its three core values—integrity, responsibility and accountability. Not only that, but the OLG, according to Marin, became too close with its retailers and turned a blind eye to questionable winnings by the very people who sell tickets.

From 1999 to July 2006 about \$100 million in prizes worth more than \$50,000 have been won by retail owners and employees.

One such case was in Burlington in which \$12.5 million was paid out to a woman who signed a declaration stating she did not have a brother and was not connected to any retailer. The OLG then discovered that she had the same last name as the retailer who had generated the free play ticket, and he confirmed she was his sister. Confronted with this, she said was trying to protect family privacy.

"Incredibly, despite all this, the corporation paid her the \$12.5 million..." stated Marin's report.

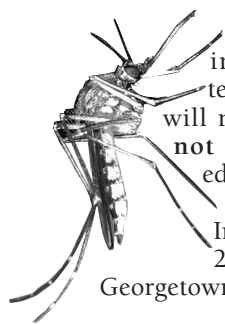
Even when these wins seemed suspicious to OLG officials nothing was done. In fact, ousted CEO Duncan Brown told an OLG official who complained, "Sometimes you hold your nose..."

Marin said the OLG was also "rude and inept" when dealing with complaints from customers who felt cheated. In the case of an 83-year-old cancer survivor, who was cheated out of a \$250,000 winning ticket by a convenience store clerk, the corporation spent millions fighting him in court instead of helping him get his rightful prize.

While the Province has taken steps to restore trust in the lottery system and vows to implement all of Marin's recommendations—such as tougher rules, more enforcement, monitoring of retailers and an independent oversight of the corporation—there is no escaping the fact Ontario taxpayers have been the victim of the perfect crime.

Something bugging you?

Send us a letter!



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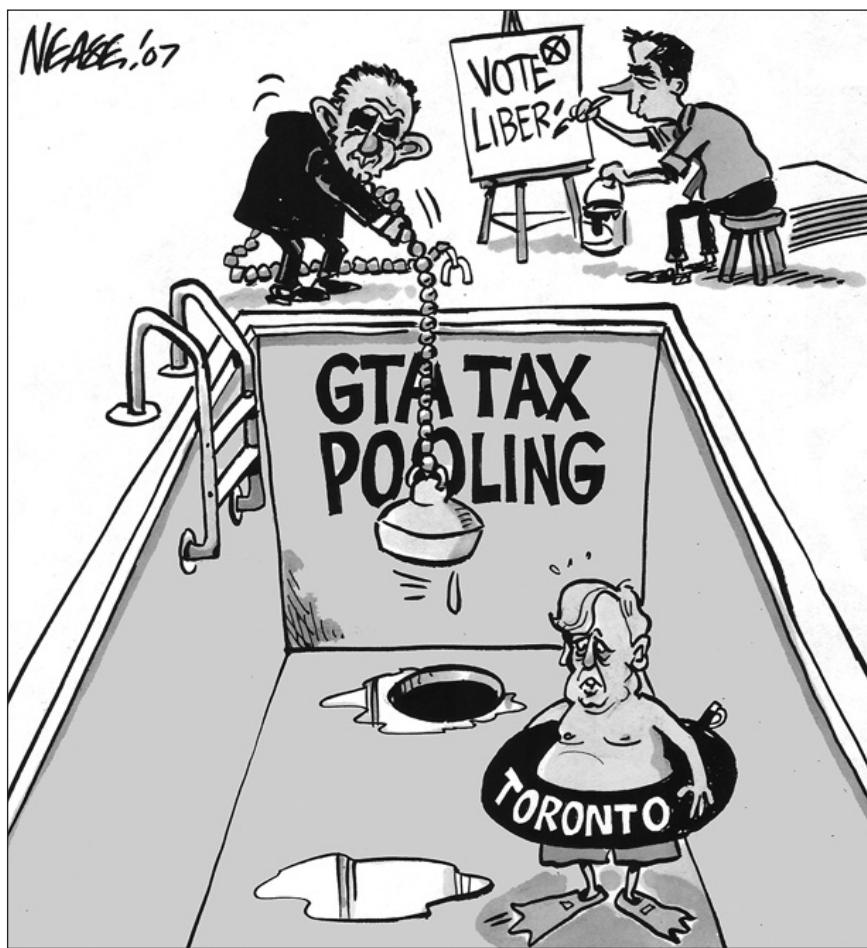
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Steve Nease



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Province must provide money for growth

Dear editor,

As a first year undergraduate student at the University of Waterloo in urban planning, I feel that it is necessary to respond to Lisa Tallyn's article "Fairness fight taken to Queen's Park (March 9).

With Halton expecting 312,000 more people in the next 25 years, it is imperative that the provincial government provides adequate funds to be able to support this growth.

If the Places to Grow plan does result in growth to Georgetown with little money from the government, the

outcome will be a catastrophe of quickly developed houses (presumably resembling Georgetown South).

Halton needs to initiate a plan for sustainable growth in order to accommodate new immigrants and residents to Georgetown. With more money, plans can properly be put in place, meeting the desired accommodations including proper water supply, land-use, appeal, and the like.

Halton needs as much money as is available from the provincial government if the Places to Grow plan is intended to efficiently accommodate

the surge of growth expected before 2031. Without sufficient funds, growth will be sloppy and likely deter growth from happening, rather than attracting new residents.

Matthew Cunnington, Georgetown

Like it or leave it

Dear editor,

Wow, who would have thought that the closing of the local cinema would be such an emotional issue for so many people?

I don't think we should speculate why the cinema closed, but realize that it may not reopen again. Times change and businesses come and go—remember Burger King, Taco Bell and Curwood Packaging?

All businesses have a lifecycle and then they're done i.e. pool halls, arcades and coal and ice delivery to the home. What seems to be the underlying issue is the growth of our town and the loss of its small-town charm and the different things that old and new residents alike want and expect Georgetown to be. While some people want no growth at all, others want to have all the amenities of a Brampton or Mississauga.

Georgetown can't be everything for everyone and that is why it's what it is—a small town on the cusp of change; like it or leave it.

Perhaps the cinema's closing can be a wake-up call for all of us to appreciate the charm and service our local businesses provide and to support them whenever we can.

Ray Eckert, Georgetown

Reader's attitude is what's wrong with society

Dear editor,

Re: March 9 letter Mom was too trusting of stranger.

The problem with "today's society" is Mr. Penny's attitude. Let's not go overboard. How sad it is that what would certainly seem to me, from Ms. Baker's letter, this kind and completely innocent gesture of a stranger to a young child, who was with his mother, was turned into a sinister act. Don't forget that young Mr. Baker approached the stranger, not the other way around.

Now, because of your letter and closed-minded attitude, there will be Good Samaritans who think twice about being kind to others, just in case they are seen as having an ulterior motive.

Please don't misunderstand me. I DO believe that children need to be taught about the dangers of talking to

strangers, but let's remember that this child was with his mother.

You ask, what on earth was this woman thinking? In her own words "This random act of kindness really warmed my heart. To live in a community where the innocence of childhood is cherished, and small conversations welcome (not frowned upon or viewed as rude) makes me, especially as a parent, feel quite content." Perhaps it is you, sir, who needs a lesson in talking to strangers.

And please don't excuse my letter as being written by a woman who obviously has no children. I have four and they have been taught time and again not to talk to strangers without their parents present. Ms. Baker, I would have done the same thing as you did.

Sue Behan, Georgetown