

# EDITORIAL

with Hartley Coles

## Quit your bellyachin'

More than a few of us in smaller towns and cities in Ontario get a little tired of the bellyaching from the City of Toronto about the need for assistance from the Province and the federal government in order to balance their budgets. Toronto residents have perks that smaller town people can only dream of, let alone ever obtain, and in most cases are paying higher property taxes than their Toronto cousins.

Then along comes a study by the Frontier Centre for Public Policy, a western Canadian think tank which points out that poor public disclosure and archaic accounting may have a lot to do with the infrastructure problems in Canada's large cities. According to the study, the failure of bridges, water and waste water systems are directly related to poor information about assets and their condition and this obscures the substantial capital funding required to make up shortfalls in maintenance, renewal and replacement.

The Federation of Canadian Municipalities estimated that the infrastructure deficit grew over four years from \$60 billion to an estimated \$123 billion. That's only a guesstimate because only half the municipalities surveyed responded. If it's close to being true it would mean a funding requirement of between \$1,800 and \$3,700 per person.

Putting it into context the lead of municipal debt as a proportion of median household income in Canada was 2.9% in 2005 or about \$1,800 per household – low by most standards, says the Frontier Centre. However, many municipalities' accounting practices are substandard and should be replaced in order to get a better picture.

Again, practices vary. Six of Canada's largest cities are debt-free, but Montreal has an average of \$8,274 of debt per household. With school board levies left out, a Montreal household pays \$2,060 per year on average in property taxes. Over in Richmond Hill, household par is \$846, four times less than \$3,522 average in Montreal.

So then are services in high tax places better? Not so, says the Frontier index. They found that municipalities with a broader range of activities – beyond core structures – tend to spend more, bumping the maintenance of roads and the operation of such things as art galleries in the same financial statements. When bridges start to fall down it's time to set priorities.

Half of Canadian's live in the 30 largest cities from Halifax to Vancouver but few are fully accountable by international standards. Because municipal reporting is littered with information deficits, the Frontier Centre says full accrual accounting, better asset management and public disclosure can't come fast enough.

It would also help those of us in the boonies to better understand why cities such as Toronto are always in crisis.

## Political correctness

The most recent disclosure of "political correctness" from Ontario's issuer of personalized licence plates has to make one wonder what kind of nincompoops we've got in some areas of government.

It concerned a retired United Church minister whose personalized licence plates carried the message REV JO for 20 years. When she applied to renew her plates with the same wording, the board which accepts or rejects the requests turned her down saying the plates carried a Christian message which was unacceptable.

When word got out that her request was turned down, the public outcry was loud and predictable. So the Reverend Jo reapplied for the plates. Well, they turned her down again saying the REV was some sort of alcoholic drink which was causing crashes and the plates would be promoting it.

The din became so loud after that, Premier Dalton McGuinty had to step in and overrule board members saying it was time for some common sense. And it was. But it's not only in government areas.

Last year the Acton Ministerial Association applied to PetroCan for use of their billboard at the corner of Churchill Rd and Queen St for a "Keep Christ in Christmas" message. PetroCan turned them down saying it was "too controversial." Obviously the company can't spell because "Christ" is always in Christmas. Fortunately, the Ministerial Association was able to get another billboard in a better location to display their message which PetroCan found controversial.

It's enough to make one cut up their PetroCan card.



**TANNER READERS:** The boys pictured here are soldiers of the Light Infantry, 2nd Battalion of the Royal Canadian Regiment, stationed in Gagetown, New Brunswick. Each week, Darryl Matton of Acton gets *The New Tanner* mailed to him so that they can all enjoy it. Darryl is pictured here, third from right, kneeling with his fellow soldiers. This lot will be heading off to Afghanistan in August of next year, where hopefully they will be able to continue to receive *The New Tanner*. - Submitted photo

## My cell phone and I are twins

There are times when technology seems to take over our lives. How many times a day do you spend at work checking emails? Can we actually live without the television being on while we have dinner? Is it possible for that child to have fun playing in the snow instead of wondering about if they are getting a Wii for Christmas?

I have to admit, as the Dude says, I am surgically attached to my cell phone. Rarely if ever is it shut off. When friends pass me driving home at night, they notice I have it attached to my head. When I call one of my friends on my cell phone, her husband always asks me where I am driving to.

I didn't start off having it be my Siamese twin, yet it has developed into it. Over the past years, I have worn out at least three phones. That in itself should have told me something.

This past Thursday I went to charge my cell phone before heading off to bed. It didn't seem to be working properly, however, I just chalked it up to a bad connection.

It wasn't a bad connection. The phone was on it's death bed. I realized that by Friday night when it started beeping and having serious health issues. My father insisted it



By  
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was the battery. He has the same cell phone as mine and I quickly confiscated his and swapped batteries. Before I knew it, his battery was dead and moments before it was fully charged.

This did not go over well. It was beyond my control. The cell phone had developed an illness that sucked battery power and wouldn't charge. The end was near.

That night as I headed home from work, the end come. It was time for me to live on my own without my Siamese twin. Then the odd thing happened. I had this sense of relief of being able to live on my own.

The Dude was selling Christmas trees with the Kinsmen that night and I stopped to see him on my way. One of the other Kinsmen looked twice at me and asked how I was. "Super!" I informed him. He looked a third time at me and told me I looked different and I seemed happy. I was. For the moment, if I wasn't home or near a conventional

phone, I could escape.

Twelve hours later, my escape was coming to a close. After some investigation I realized a new phone was more reasonable over seeing if my twin could be brought back to life.

Saturday was a new world for me. The only contact I had with life as I knew it would be if I was at home or seeing someone eyeball to eyeball. Traveling down to Milton, I had a bit of unease as far as what would happen if I broke down. Then again, people before cell phone broke down and survived. Later that night, the Dude asked if I used my new phone yet. I had not and he couldn't help but comment that I seemed happy about it. I liked the new phone, but I liked even more that it still hadn't been turned on.

Sunday morning, with hesitation, I pushed the green button. I had survived without a cell phone, yet, reality had to return and my new twin, "Red," named for the colour of the phone, was soon attached to me like the old one. The only problem is, with technology, unless you're under the age of 20, it's harder and harder to keep up. I've figured out how to place a call and to answer, but it's going to take me a while to figure out everything else.



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