



COMMENT

Here's an opportunity to speak your mind

If you're a parent or taxpayer interested in getting information or giving input on the Halton District School Board's budget process, your opportunity is coming.

The board will hold a community gathering on the topic on Wednesday, May 28 at 7 p.m. at E.C. Drury High School on Ontario Street.

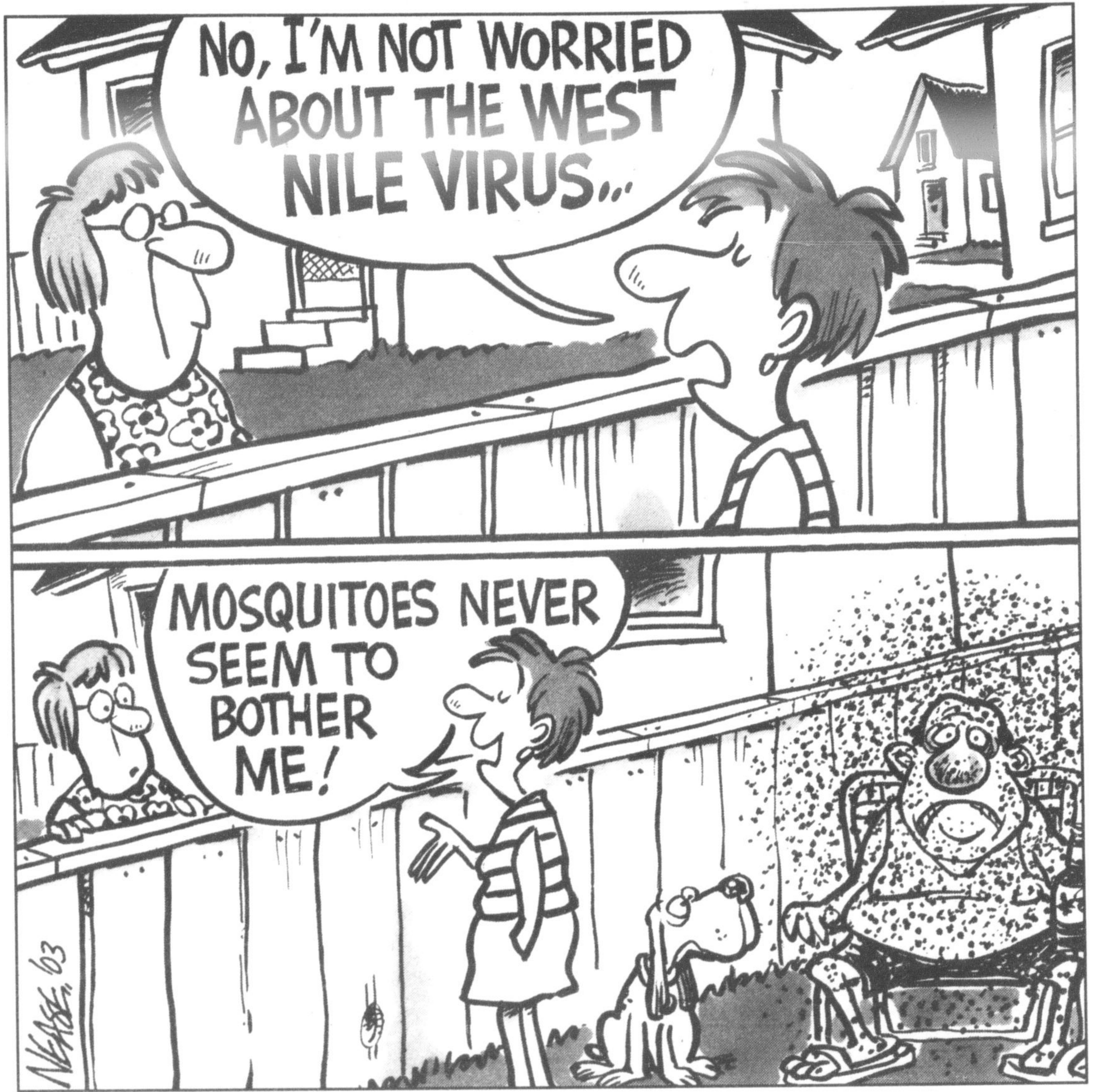
Trustees and board staff will share information and collect ideas from the public on funding issues facing the board as it prepares its 2003-04 budget.

Trustees will present an overview of the funding allocated to the board and the process undertaken to draft an operational budget.

Trustees have opted to hold just one budget meeting this spring in the geographic centre of Halton instead of the two or three usually rotated around the region.

"I can't stress enough how important it is for the public to attend this meeting," said board Chair Ethel Gardiner. "The decisions we make at this time of the year, during the development of the budget, have direct implications on students in classrooms for the next school year."

We couldn't agree more.



OUR READERS WRITE

Doctor says decriminalizing marijuana would be a strike against health and well being of our country's children

(The following letter was addressed to Halton MP Julian Reed and a copy was filed with *The Champion*.)

Dear Editor:

This letter is in response to Halton MP Julian Reed's January 20 letter about his government's proposal to decriminalize marijuana.

The ill effects of smoking modern marijuana have multiplied over the last 30 to 40 years, as today's marijuana is about 25 times more potent than it was in the 1960s. Marijuana use contributes significantly to

motor vehicle crashes. It slows reaction time and decreases the ability to judge distance and time. It worsens short-term memory, learning, and attention span.

Perhaps the worst consequence is that teenagers who use marijuana have been found to be about 100 times more likely to use cocaine than those who've never smoked marijuana — hence its description as a gateway drug which is the generally accepted viewpoint of police officers and others directly involved with these teenagers.

Excessive alcohol consumption and regular tobacco use are two of the known risk factors for the development of modern chronic illnesses such as hypertension, heart disease, diabetes, and cancer.

With much higher concentrations of lung contaminants, smoking marijuana will significantly add to the risk for the development of these chronic conditions in our teenagers, in addition to the ill effects listed above.

We know that up to 70 per cent of modern illnesses and their associated costs in North America are lifestyle-related, and therefore preventable. This is why Health Canada and the provincial governments are trying to reduce these same risk factors to promote improved health in Canadians.

If your goal and that of the Canadian government is to make it legal for some patients to receive marijuana as a medicine, then create appropriate outlets where these medical prescriptions can be legally filled.

Decriminalizing marijuana will also

severely compromise the efforts of our treatment and rehabilitation institutions. And this at a time when "punk-offs" or teenage street robberies are escalating and the judicial system is increasingly sending these youth to such centres to get the help they need.

Let us pass laws in Canada that promote health and wellness in our children and future citizens, and not the reverse. Teenagers should be helped to say no to drugs and of course to say no to smoking cigarettes and no to alcohol abuse, and not encouraged to use them.

Being a teenager is hard enough without pushing them toward experimentation, drug use, drug abuse, drug addiction and crime.

Rewards and incentives as well as deterrents can play an effective role here, as they also can in counteracting the risk factors for the modern chronic illnesses that are lifestyle related.

**Dr. Christopher Eriksson, CEO
The Art of Healthy Living Inc.**

Have your say on an issue with a letter to the editor. Fax all your letters anytime to (905) 878-4943.



THE CANADIAN CHAMPION

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by Steve Nease

