

# Comment

## Justice for whom?

Proponents of tougher penalties for Canadian youths who run afoul of the law will probably have a field day with a recent incident at a Burlington youth court last month.

A 14-year-old, who can't be identified under the Youth Criminal Justice Act, reportedly made an obscene gesture before dropping his pants and 'mooning' a television camera as it filmed him outside the local courthouse.

The youth was one of five teens in court facing a mischief charge related to the highly-publicized booby-trapping of a park's playground equipment. One would expect a teen facing such a serious charge to be on his best behaviour when in court.

Anyone who believes our youth justice system doesn't provide enough of a deterrent to recidivism will point to this incident as proof that some teens view and treat our court system as a joke.

But this is no laughing matter.

Any teen who holds such disdain and indifference for the youth justice system isn't likely to suddenly alter his behaviour as an adult.

Speaking of adults, what responsibility

should be transferable to the parents of any youth who repeatedly finds himself on the wrong side of the law?

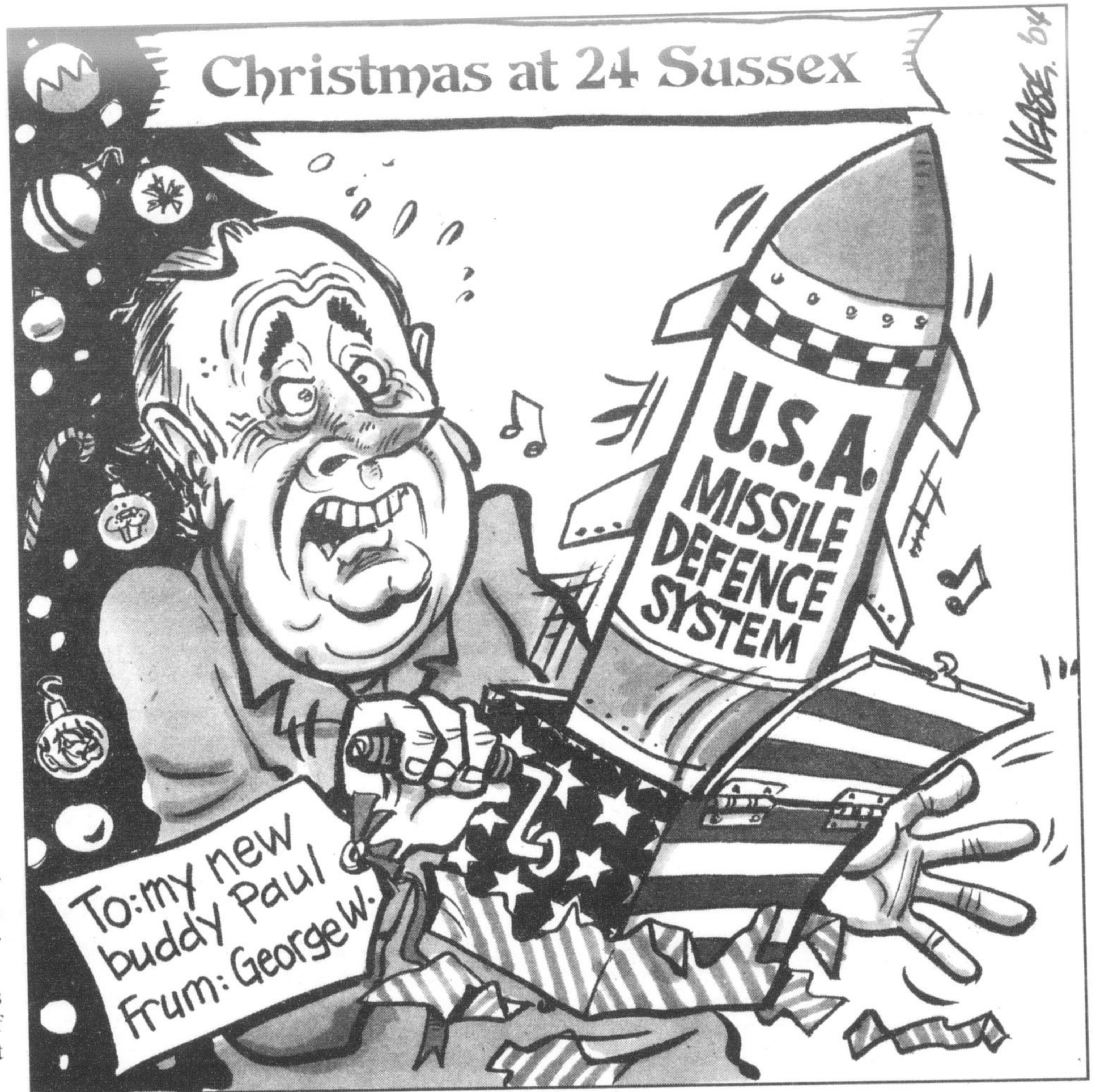
Parenting — or the lack thereof — has the single greatest influence on what kind of young people our society produces.

If a sense of morality is never established, can children be faulted for not appreciating why things they do are wrong?

We're not sure there's a simple solution to this problem. However, we're certain there will always be a small segment of the youth and adult populations that are willing to risk doing time for the potential personal payoff committing a crime offers.

We see two ways of keeping the recidivist segment of our youth population in check. We can make penalties for all crimes tougher. We can transfer some of the criminal responsibility of youths who commit crime to their parents or guardians.

Ignoring the problem only reinforces the view that the potential rewards of crime outweigh the possible punishment meted out by our youth justice system.



## Our Readers Write

### Affordable housing indeed a crisis in Halton

Dear Editor:

I'd like to thank The Champion for its recent editorial regarding the affordable housing crisis in Halton.

It's time the people of Milton and Halton acknowledged the seriousness of the housing situation, which promises to only get worse. Rents are beyond the means of many of our fellow residents.

The resulting housing insecurity has far-reaching effects, not just for those residents, but the community as a whole.

Some rely on food banks to bridge the gap, while many are forced out of their community to find affordable housing.

What many fail to realize is that this is

costing all of us money. The fallout of homelessness and housing insecurity is felt in health care, social services, the education system and the justice system.

Furthermore, how can the municipalities in Halton attract businesses when the employees who might work in them can't afford to live here? We need to ask our elected representatives at the federal, provincial and regional levels what they're doing to address this situation.

All the people in Milton and Halton — not just the wealthy — deserve safe, stable and affordable housing.

**Kathleen Szoke, vice-chair  
Affordable Housing Halton**

### Closing more schools isn't the answer

Dear Editor:

The education director of the Halton District School Board recently cited overcrowding at Milton's Chris Hadfield School as a reason why trustees should retain the option of closing more schools next June.

Dr. Dusty Papke suggested that by continuing to close schools, the board would more quickly qualify for the funds needed to build the new schools that would relieve overcrowding at places like Chris Hadfield, where, he said, "we have 1,200 kids in a 650-pupil place school."

This, I believe, is a misleading argument.

First, there are never really 1,200

kids at that school at any given time. That number includes hundreds of kindergarten students, who only attend half-time. When one half of the kindergarten students are at school, the other half is at home.

More importantly, there's no need to close schools to relieve overcrowding at Chris Hadfield, since many of Milton's other public schools are currently underutilized.

Chris Hadfield is bursting with students, while other Milton schools are unnecessarily empty because that's how the school board has decided to use its buildings.

If the board had wanted Chris Hadfield less full, it could, for example, have given it a smaller catchment area. Or it could have

converted some kindergarten to grade 5 schools to a kindergarten to grade 6 format — as has been done in Burlington. This would divert Hadfield's senior students to the places freed up at our town's middle schools.

In my opinion, the school board has deliberately overcrowded a single school and created a crisis atmosphere to support its own call for an aggressive pace of school construction — a slick PR move, indeed. But slick PR moves, in my opinion, should have no place in an honest debate over whether more school closures are needed.

**Alan Wain  
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### Pud

by Steve Nease

