

Comment

The Canadian Champion

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Costly political pasture

Prime Minister Paul Martin's nine appointments to the Senate last week once again reaffirm the belief the upper chamber has outlived its usefulness — if it ever had any.

While claiming to be a proponent of Senate reform, Martin followed the tried, true and abhorrent method of past PMs to use Senate appointments as a way of giving a pat on the back to party friends — sort of like Adscam, just without the secrecy.

Most galling of Martin's appointments was that of former defence minister Art Eggleton who was forced to step down in 2002 when it was revealed he gave an untendered \$36,500 government contract to an ex-girlfriend.

Likely more important to landing a comfy Senate seat, however, was the fact Eggleton didn't run in his Toronto riding in the last election, allowing star candidate Ken Dryden to run instead.

Eggleton now gets to sit with other political dinosaurs until the age of 75

and will pocket a tidy yearly salary of \$116,000, plus benefits. Taxpayers' money, of course.

Martin's other appointees included two who will sit as Conservatives and one (Lillian Dyck) as an NDPer. To his credit NDP leader Jack Layton immediately distanced his party from Dyck saying she's "not a New Democrat."

"We believe you need... to be elected by the citizens," said Layton.

"That's how you become a legislator."

Exactly. Senate reform has never been a sexy election issue and with a minority government in place it has an even lower priority now.

However, Canadians should recognize the Senate for the sham it has become and voice their displeasure at this cavalier waste of tax dollars with their local MP. That is, before their MP becomes a sitting member of this retirement home for politicians.

Our Readers Write

Champion's editorial about dysfunction among school board trustees misleading

Dear Editor:

Could The Champion's March 22 editorial claiming dysfunction among the trustees of the Halton District School Board be any more one-sided and misleading?

Unfortunately I believe, for students, parents and staff of the region's public school system, the answer is probably no.

It's one thing for an editorial writer to forcefully present arguments supporting personal views on controversial issues, but it's quite another to let — what is in my opinion — personal feelings or agendas cloud the presentation of facts.

The editorial writer bases his or her case for 'dysfunction' on what

are called "a series of bizarre incidents at this board." However, of the three unrelated incidents cited, I believe only the latest, involving alleged assault charges, could be characterized as bizarre.

The two other incidents involved elected officials disagreeing on issues critical to the delivery of public education in our community — the provision of a formal program for gifted students and the process governing school closure and new school construction decisions. Is it bizarre that our trustees would voice strong opinions on such issues?

The editorial then goes on to make two inferences, that the inter-

ests of all public education are somehow competing against personal and political agendas, and that said competition is somehow preventing work, as a group, at the board room table.

These claims are, in my opinion, purposely vague and, not surprisingly, totally unsubstantiated.

Informed debate and dissent are necessary ingredients to a healthy democracy. We demand no more from our elected representatives and we should expect no less. And less appears to be what The Champion's editorial was communicating.

Casey Kalvaitis
Oakville

Students' efforts prove inspirational to rest of us

Ask any of the students from Milton District High School who travelled last month to Grenada, and they'll tell you it was an eye-opening experience.

Ask any of the students' parents, and they'll most likely say it was one of the best things their sons and daughters could have done.

Ask their principal, and he'll say it was the best student venture he's ever had the privilege of seeing to fruition.

"It was absolutely, unbelievably great," said Ian Jones, principal of Milton District High School (MDHS). "I've been doing this (organizing such trips) for 36 years and this is by far the most impressive venture we've sent the kids on."

One of the things that made it impressive, he said, was the fact it was done from start to finish by the group of 32 students, six staff members and four volunteers. They didn't just come along-

side a humanitarian group, they did it themselves.

Kudos to each student who travelled to Grenada for two weeks last month to build and re-build homes ravaged in last September's hurricane.

They devoted selflessly of their time, effort and finances to help others, and the memories of those two weeks will serve as a continual reward for their actions, I'm sure.

Kudos as well to the Miltonians who dug deep into their pockets to support the students. According to Mr. Jones, the group raised about \$55,000 in cash donations and about \$90,000 in material and tools. It seems the group's goal of raising \$120,000 wasn't so lofty after all, which should teach us all a lesson about the importance of aiming high.

The team was able to build six complete homes and leave the islanders with four pre-fabricated



with STEPHANIE THIESSEN

Around town

homes they can put together themselves.

Here at The Champion, we've been able to watch the project progress from start to finish, and it seems a fitting conclusion to offer you, our readers, a photo feature (on page B12) comprised of snapshots taken by the students during their trip.

The looks on the faces of some of the recipients

of the new homes are priceless — no written story could do it justice.

The way I see it, the MDHS team has given Miltonians a gift — the chance to take part in the trip through financial support. On the Web site designed by the team are listed the individuals and companies who contributed. Each of those names deserves to take some credit for the smiles depicted in the photo feature.

For those who for whatever reason didn't jump on board, there's still a chance. The group is still looking to raise about \$2,000 to cover the expenses of the trip.

Wouldn't helping them raise that last little bit be a great way for Miltonians to show our admiration for them?

For information on the various ways to make a donation, visit www.mdshelpsgrenada.org.