

OPINION

Down to the wire

If the Ministry of Education isn't prepared to put its school-funding policy where its mouth has been in recent years, it should at least have the decency to admit it's failing public education in Halton.

Since being elected in the fall of 2003, Dalton McGuinty's Liberal government has said all the right things regarding new-school funding in Ontario, but has offered little to back up those words.

It has been almost 30 months since the newly-elected Liberals placed a moratorium on school closures.

At the time, the announcement came as enormous relief to older neighbourhoods where established schools with declining enrolment were being targeted for closure.

While the policy of the previous Tory government — where school closures had to occur in order to trigger enough pupil spaces to justify new school grants — might have made sense on some bureaucratic ledger, it pitted established neighbourhoods against new ones as parents fought tooth and nail to keep their schools.

Putting its faith in the McGuinty government, the Halton District School Board remained cautiously optimistic an improved school-funding policy would be forthcoming.

Last week that good faith ran out.

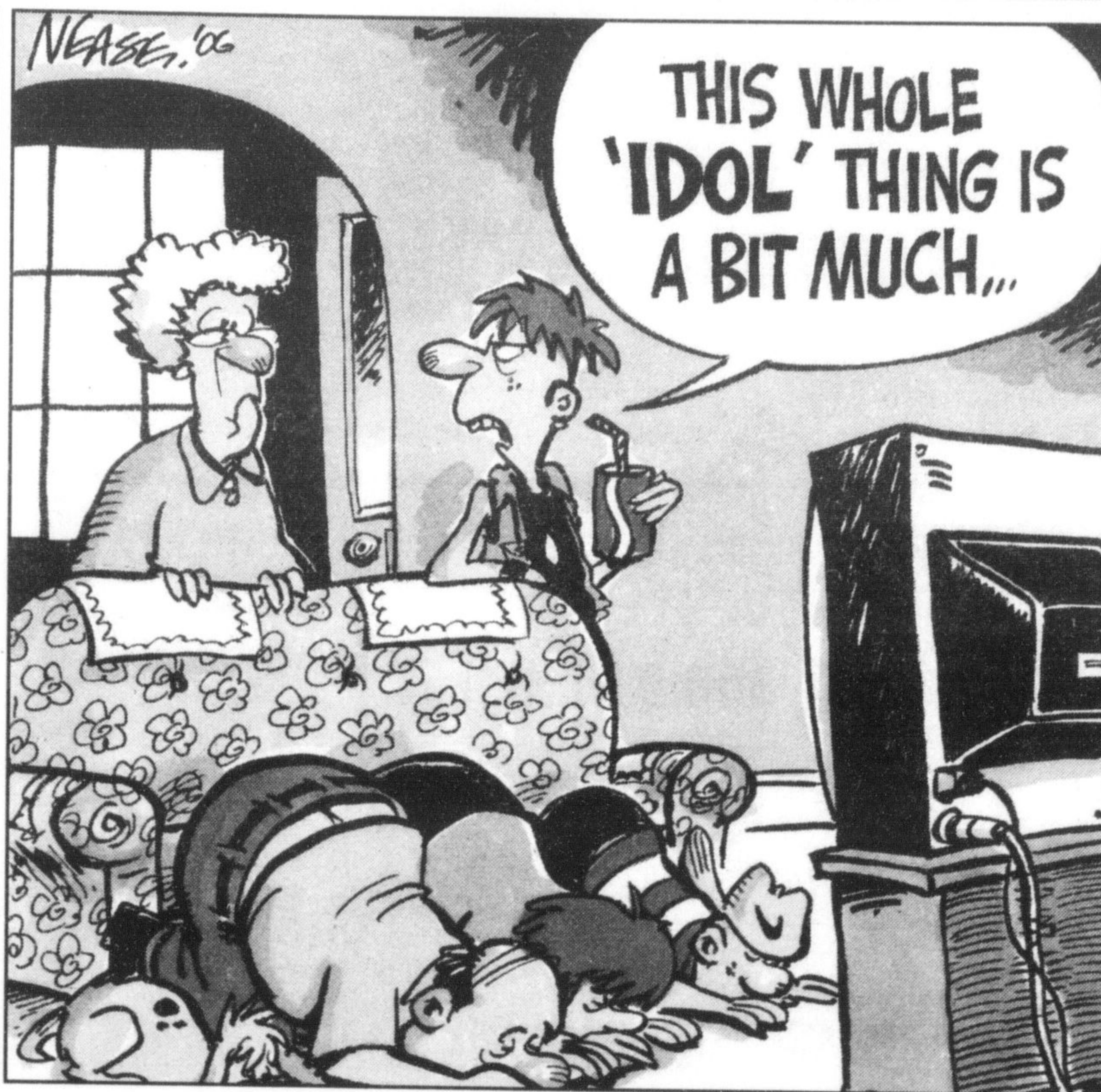
"It is an untenable situation," public school trustees were told last week by Steven Parfeniuk, superintendent of business for the board. The senior administrator said between 1999 and 2006 more than 8,000 pupil spaces were created in Halton through the construction of 13 new schools.

However, since the board hasn't closed any schools recently, it faces a \$2.6-million shortfall between the cost of the new schools and the grants it received to build them. Parfeniuk fears the debt could jeopardize future schools for high-growth neighbourhoods in Milton, Burlington, Oakville and Halton Hills — including six new elementary schools in five years.

If the debt is erased, Parfeniuk believes a gap between allocated capital grant money and the cost of modern schools would likely mean the board's next schools will be built without such features as multi-purpose rooms, auditoriums, science and technology labs and air-conditioning.

While the Tories' school-funding formula resulted in the ugliness of school boards having to rip the heart out of neighbourhoods by closing their schools, the Liberal system seems to put new neighbourhoods at risk of being without a school.

If this is the best the Liberals can offer, the Halton District School Board's ability to keep pace with the region's growth is in serious jeopardy.



ReadersWrite

Send your letters to miltone@haltonsearch.com or drop them off at 875 Main St. E.

Hospital parking should be free

DEAR EDITOR:

After visiting a friend in the hospital lately, I was again reminded of my pet peeve in the last few years.

What kind of society have we become that we charge the loved ones and friends of sick patients to park at our so-called great hospitals?

How can any political person stand by without doing something about this practice? How does anyone who's part of this practice look at themselves in the mirror?

We're hurting the people who need

help, hitting them with a not-too-small parking fee while they're down.

Our taxes paid for and maintain these hospitals, which in many cases are over-staffed with overpaid administrative personnel — probably to make sure the parking fees are collected.

I believe it's time for the public to speak up on this kind of money-making practice, which hurts the people that are already hurting. Speak up, people. It's time to hear from the little guys.

AL LISK
MILTON

Upfront

Future guilt will be tough to bear for cemetery vandals

Like most Miltonians, I was quite upset by last week's vandalism at Evergreen Cemetery — the second such incident in less than a month.

Now I'm not here to deliver a verbal scolding to those involved, whom I can only assume are members of our teenage population. Any such effort on my part would be a tad bit hypocritical.

No, I never did anything as vile as desecrating someone's final resting place — God forbid — or even cause many of the other types of damage that are often reported in our weekly police blotter section. But growing up in Milton in the '80s, I certainly wasn't immune to the occasional act of stupidity.

Despite having great parents and no emotional problems to speak of, every now and then I would find myself part of some moronic activity like whipping snowballs at passing motorists or peppering houses with eggs on the eve of Halloween (aka, Devil's Night).

And while alcohol wasn't involved, there were a couple of incidents with the family car that were deserving of any colourful attack on my intelligence you could possibly think of.

I suppose I could write this off as simple misspent youth, right? I hung with a bad crowd. Lots of teens do that kind of thing.

While certainly convenient, I can't let myself off the hook like that. Rationalizations are just way too easy. Bottom line is that while I was basically a good kid, there were times when I really crossed a line — and even put myself and others in harm's way — simply because I couldn't see beyond myself or the next few minutes.

With my cloak of ignorance long since lifted, I'm able to do that now. And while fortunately I don't have anything to be genuinely ashamed of, I don't feel too good about

some of the asinine stunts I once pulled.

I can only imagine the guilt these cemetery vandals are going to have to carry around with them in latter life — when they finally mature.

So on the off chance that any misguided youths are reading this — either voluntarily, or at mom or dad's request — here's a little free advice that could be quite valuable one day.

If you recognize yourself in any of this type of behaviour — seemingly petty or not — just stop it. Stop because there's more to think about than you and your buddies' entertainment. Stop because your parents don't deserve the potential grief. Stop because you're hurting others. Stop because you might actually get caught.

And if for no other reason, stop because your future self will hate you if you don't.



Steve LeBlanc

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