

Opinion

I've had it with taxes, politics

Gas. Not the after-dinner kind. No, we're talking petrol.

With gasoline now hovering consistently above 50 cents a litre and averaging 55 cents a litre, we've got a problem.

When automotive fuel was first switched to metric pricing in 1980 it sold for about 19 cents a litre or roughly \$1 a gallon. Shortly after, we were hit with a stiff tax increase on gas which pushed the price to 25 cents a litre. This money was supposed to be used to support the Canadian oil and gas industry, to make us self-sufficient in that area.

Since then we have been treated to a steady drumbeat of tax increases on gasoline from both the federal and provincial governments. Now you pay about 50 per cent of the price of gas as tax.

You also pay high taxes on luxury goods such as tobacco and liquor. You pay sales tax. You pay various hidden taxes on manufactured goods and you will — supposedly instead — soon pay the GST (Goods and Services Tax). Oh yeah, and you pay income tax.

Gasoline is taxed like a luxury. It is not a luxury. It is necessary to our society, to move people and goods and keep the engines of commerce running. Canadian demographics and geography require cheap and reliable transportation. Our system has been built with that as a given and our prosperity depends upon it. Already we pay too much money as a percentage of income to simply get around.

If that isn't bad enough, the tax money which has been collected from gasoline has not found its way into dramatically improved highways and public transport.

Good transportation is key to the economic growth of a region. For the last 10 years politicians have constantly pushed highway building programs to the back of their agendas. In Toronto they built a modern mass transit system, and then instead of improving it and planning for the future, they sat back and admired their work.



Reaume
With a View
with
BRAD REAUME

Now we are experiencing gridlock. Now we are paying the price for the stupidity of politicians and bureaucrats with increased taxes on gasoline, the blood of the economy.

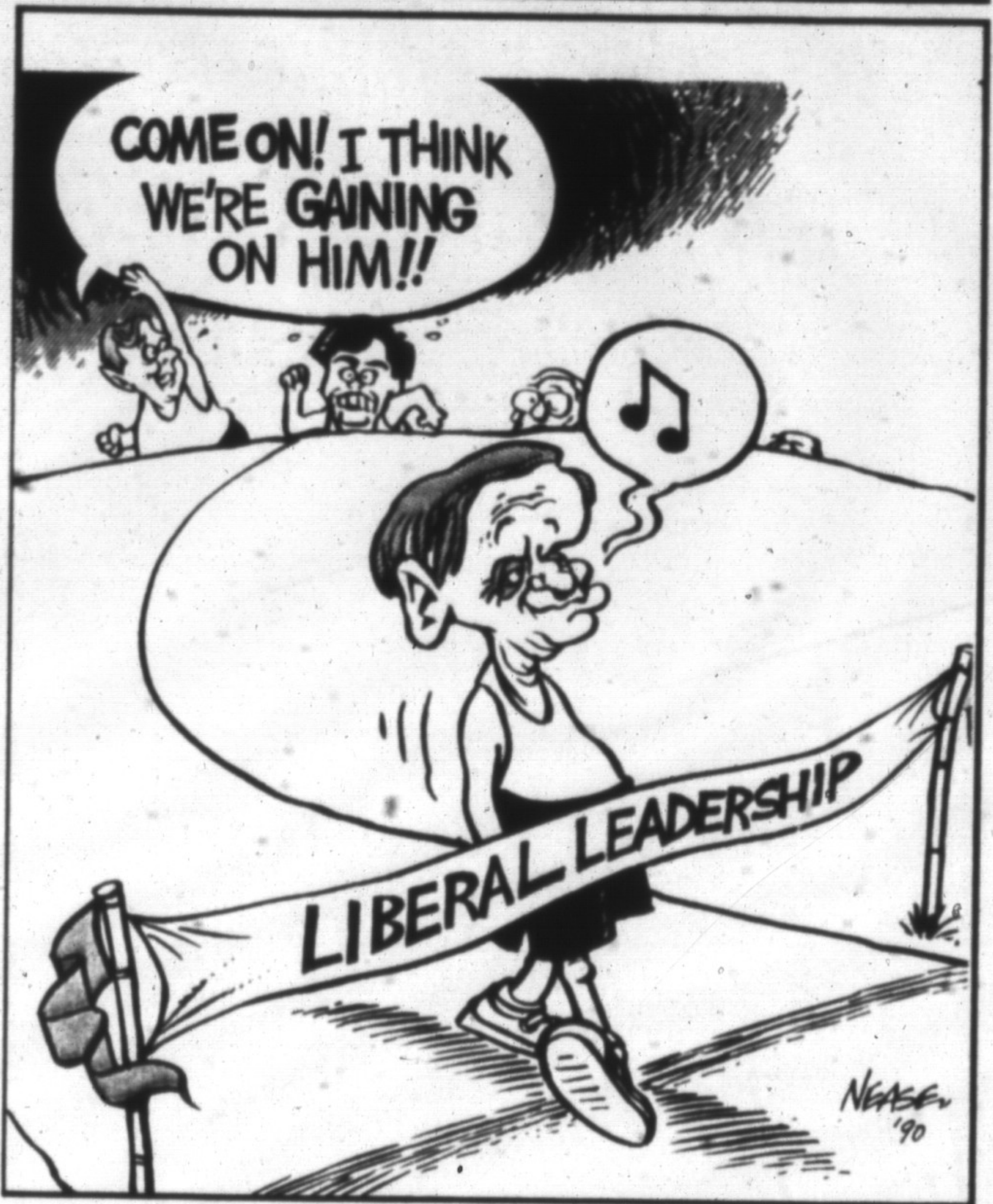
Recently announced plans for subway expansion in Toronto don't include a connection to the airport. These guys can't see a subway link to the airport in the future, when there should have been one 10 years ago.

Look at the occasional proposal by private industry to build transportation links. A private group suggested raising the cash to build a subway along a major uptown Toronto thoroughfare to help business in the area. Politicians rejected this proposal, much as they rejected the private sector's suggestion that the crumbling Gardiner Expressway be rebuilt underground with private funds.

Remember a few years ago when it was suggested that Canada annex the Turks and Caicos Islands in the Caribbean Sea? The islanders were generally in favour and it was suggested that a booming Canadian tourist industry could be built there, which would keep some of the snowbirds' tourist money in Canada. Politicians dismissed the idea without serious consideration.

Why spend time thinking about improvements to our society? Why plan ahead? All the politicians have to do is execute another tax grab to keep the whole pork barrel afloat for a little while longer.

And if Canada and Canadians suffer in the interim? Hey, you can't please everybody. Let's worry about pleasing the majority first.



Five kids in a station wagon

"Getting there is half the fun."
Not with six kids it isn't.

My friend J and I left husbands and cats at home and piled our offspring into my big station wagon for a short holiday at the cottage.

Every available seat in the car was occupied. Who sat where and with whom proved to be a constant dilemma. J and I rarely succeeded in satisfying everyone.

My four year old ended up the social outcast. "I'm not sitting with him," said J's eight-year-old son, "He talks my head off." The others concurred with him.

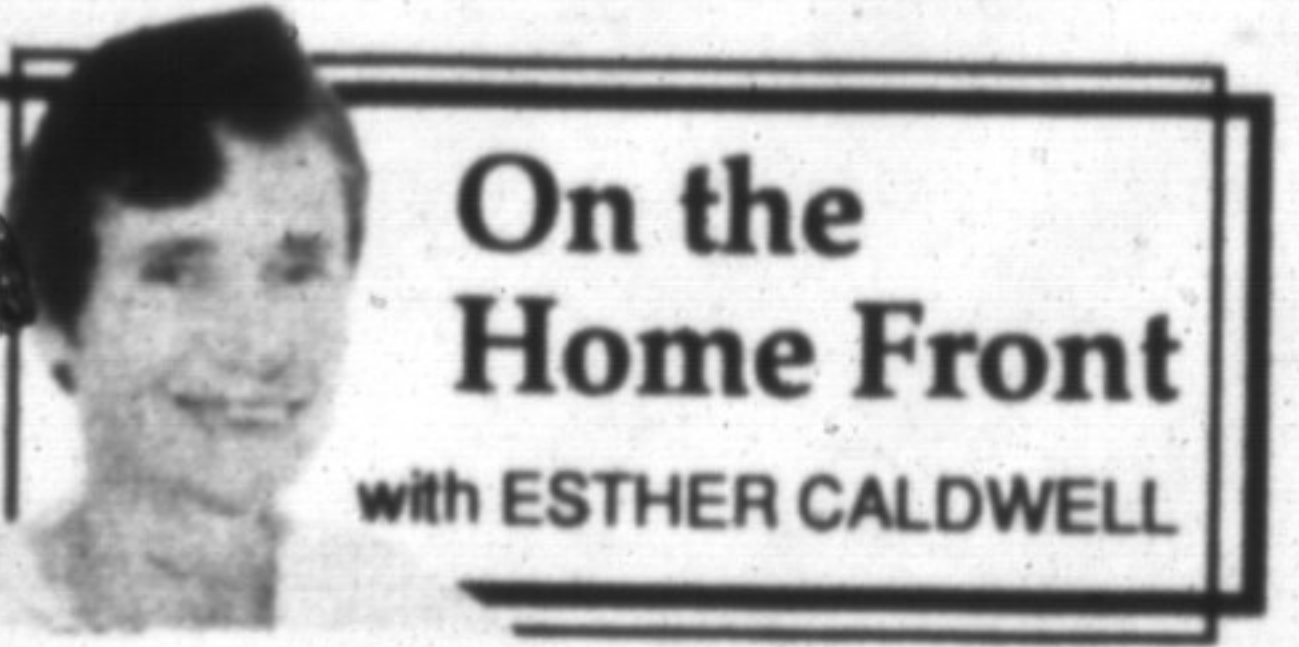
Our youngest passenger was six months old. I feared he would scream all the way to the cottage, but he was most accommodating — as long as we kept him topped up, shook a rattle two inches from his face, and occasionally pulled him out of the hard, plastic baby seat for a wriggly stretch.

Our dinky, three by four foot trailer came along for the ride, but I had no idea how to back up the car with that thing attached so I had to watch where I parked.

The dirty, oversized tarpaulin challenged us. No matter how tightly we tied the ropes around the tarp, we had to stop frequently to re-secure it. I made the mistake once of pulling off onto the shoulder along the 401 in order to confine a flapping corner of the tarp. The sandblast of gritty wind generated by the speeding vehicles was terrifying.

An hour into our journey, my 12 year old let out an anguished wail from the rear. "Oh no! I don't remember putting the gas cap back on." That lapse of memory during a fill up sent us to small towns in search of a replacement cap.

A sunflower accompanied us. My eldest had nurtured the two-foot-high plant from the time he had pushed a little seed into a pot of soil. He planned to transplant it at the cottage, but



On the
Home Front
with ESTHER CALDWELL

over the course of our stay, decided that his pampered plant could not possibly survive the blustery winds by the lake so, you guessed it, the sunflower returned with us. Much to my son's distress, it lost three leaves, thanks to misguided kicks of little feet.

One deck of playing cards complicated our return journey. Think of it — five kids and one deck. Who's going to play with whom and where are they going to sit? At one point, the two older boys were in the front seat with me, dealing 'go fish' cards to one of the girls directly behind me. "Have you got a seven, have you got a four, have you got a queen? ..."

Days before we left for the cottage, I had booked a table for lunch at my mother's small apartment — our halfway point. The brave woman obliged by stuffing us with macaroni and ice cream cones.

On the way home three days later, our lunch of leftover pizza crash-landed at a cemetery just two miles along the cottage road. Of course, the pizza had no business travelling on the roof of the car, but "silly old mommy" had placed it there temporarily while the children negotiated for the best seats. A subsequent, unscheduled stop at a general store produced our revised lunch — a box of crackers and a bag of cookies.

The sunflower is happy to be home again and so am I.

It's not the label, it's the perception

What should we call people who have below average intelligence? Mentally retarded? Slow learners? Developmentally challenged? Learning delayed? Developmentally disabled?

It's a hot topic right now. There are many groups and associations across Canada and the United States concerned about the term 'mentally retarded'. They want to change it, because it's demeaning, stigmatizing and stereotyping.

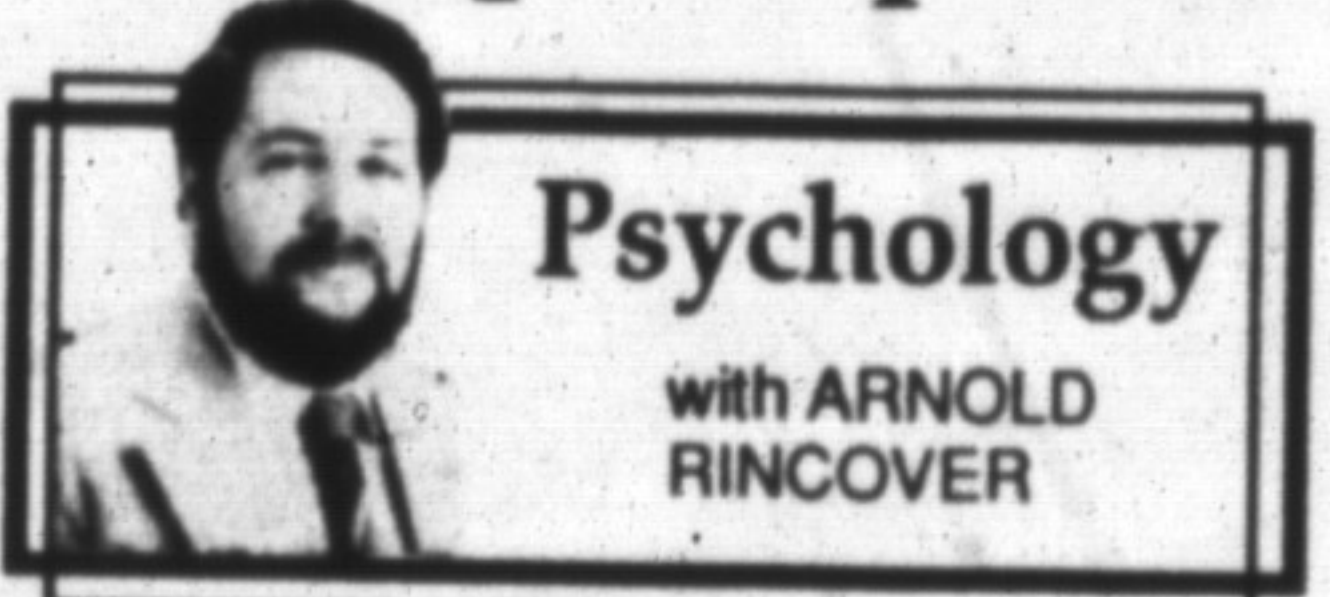
Some data suggests, however, that the label may not even matter — people are concerned about the wrong issue. For example, one school system in New York dropped all designations for 'special' classes (mentally retarded, autistic, learning disabled) and simply gave each class (including 'normal' classrooms) a number designation.

A child went to classroom one at 9 a.m. and to classroom three at 11 a.m. Officials found that in no time the numbers acquired the same stigma as the previous labels — no one wanted their child in classroom three because it was dehumanizing, stigmatizing and stereotyping.

Yale University's Edward Zigler is concerned that many parents of these children have a "Hollywood Syndrome" — they are middle or upper-class parents who shop around from expert to expert looking for a label which they feel comfortable putting on their offspring. He estimates there are more than one million mentally retarded children in the U.S. and Canada that are not getting services because no one knows they are there — they haven't been given the proper diagnosis.

The fact is you can't disguise a condition with a new label. There is no neutral label for lower intelligence. As long as the group itself is stigmatized, the label will be too, no matter how often it is changed.

Our task is to erase the stigma, not change the label. We have to eliminate the condescension toward, and fear of, people with lower intelligence. After all, our society is ex-



Psychology
with ARNOLD
RINCOVER

tremely variable on virtually all characteristics of human behaviour.

Some people are good at sports. Some are totally inept. Some are socially perceptive, others are social misfits. Some are honest and moral, others are compulsive liars or immoral. Some are nice, some are mean. Should it be any surprise that some are brighter than others?

Does it mean that a person who is slower is any less of a person? Of course not, no more so than a lack of athletic co-ordination means the same. We all are below average in some, indeed usually several, pursuits. And it's worth remembering that many mentally retarded people do in fact hold jobs, live independently, get married and have children.

When I asked a man what his brother did for a living, he answered "he's mentally retarded". He didn't even mention his brother worked as a bus boy in a restaurant. THAT was demeaning, stigmatizing, stereotyping.

There is tremendous variability in human behaviour. We need to educate our children to accept such variability, not look down upon it. This holds true for encounters with people of lesser (and greater) intelligence, those of differing colour, handicapped people and those from unfamiliar cultures.

An overly narrow view of what is 'normal' will mean our children grow up prejudiced. It will also help ensure they view their own weaknesses as more threatening than they are, as abnormal and demeaning. And that can lead to all sorts of complications.



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