

## Opinion

# Larry gives Santa very mixed reviews



**NORTHERN  
INSIGHTS**

by Larry Sanders



Santa Claus  
North Pole, Canada  
HOH OHO

Dear Mr. Claus:

Well, Santa, I did get some of the things I asked for last year, but you fell short on some others. I thought I should remind you what I asked for a year ago, with a bit of a report card on how we've done since then.

My wish list from last year follows, with a few comments after each one:

1. *All those considering a run (or re-run) at municipal or school board office in November 1991 must have only selfless, community motives when they seek our votes. These individuals should also be willing to seek what is best for all of the region around their communities, not just the parochial interest of their home town.*

You get about 50 per cent on this one, Santa. Many towns threw out people who didn't meet this job description, but not everywhere. That's democracy, eh Santa?

2. *The most expensive environmental assessment hearing ever held in Ontario on timber management, must end before you make your rounds next year by producing a new rule book for forestry, based on the principles of sustainable development of our ecosystem. If this happens, we might have a shot at having a forest industry for our grandchildren.*

You really blew this one, Santa. The hearings are expected to last at least one more year, if not two. Too bad, eh Santa? Those millions could have been used to plant a lot of trees.

3. *Dr. Bob Rosehart, recently appointed as Ontario's chief negotiator with the Nishnawbe-Aski Nation on aboriginal self-government, should find a way of allowing non-native people to have a say in developing the provincial government's position in the negotiations, without creating a wall of racist resistance from short-sighted non-native northerners.*

The jury's still out on this one, Santa. Rosehart has gone out of his way to consult a lot of people, but NAN has asked for a recess in the talks.

4. *Native leaders should work with the new provincial government to make sure they keep their promise of settling all outstanding Ontario land claims, and conclude self-government agreements, during the NDP's first term.*

This one is going well. We've seen the official recognition of First Nations as equals by the Ontario government, and talks are going on with First Nations. Whether they'll get it all done in the NDP's first term, however, is doubtful.

5. *Everyone in northern Ontario interested in a viable, environmentally friendly transportation system should come together in workshops and conferences sometime during 1991 and write a plan for a rational, integrated transportation system that won't further deplete our governments' treasuries.*

You really blew this one, Santa. Transportation doesn't seem to be on anyone's agenda.

6. *Lois Wilson, the former moderator of the United Church of Canada now sitting on the federal environmental assessment review panel studying the concept of burying high-level radioactive waste in the Canadian shield, must be allowed to apply her moral and feminist perspectives to the decision-making systems to an issue that is still dominated by male technocrats.*

The nuclear waste issue remains in a fog of radioactive mist, Santa. We know the federal government shelved the first report on low-level waste, only to dust it off again after Port Hope residents (where the low-level waste is now) complained about inaction. Hornepayne and Geraldton are the last two communities in northwestern Ontario considering being a "happy host", but their commitment remains unclear.

7. *CBC Television uses its post-cut, revised mandate of doing only national and regional programming to become an agent of change, rather than a reflection of the status quo.*

Sorry Santa, but this one remains on my wish list. I know it's hard to think of anything on television as an "agent of change", but we can dream, can't we?

8. *Bob Rae, Floyd Laughren, Shelly Martel, Howard Hampton, Bud Wildman, Shelley Wark-Martyn and Gilles Pouliot (the important Ontario NDP cabinet ministers who really can change northern Ontario) set aside partisanship and set up processes that will allow northerners to re-shape our own destinies — banning studies that lead nowhere, and putting money behind sectoral planning groups made up of northerners. I want you to convince the new government to replace the Northern Development Councils, which have only been a sounding board for government and an expensive way of safeguarding parochial interests. Instead, we need task forces with expertise and resources*

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## Alcohol and drug use among students decline

Although fewer students are using alcohol and other drugs, those who do use are consuming more, a new study by the Addiction Research Foundation shows.

"The good news is that the percentage of students using alcohol and other drugs has decreased over the past decade and even in the past two years," says ARF scientist Dr. Reginald Smart.

"But on the down side, our study shows a small but significant increase in the percentage of students considered to be 'heavy' users of drugs," Smart says.

The Ontario Student Drug Survey, conducted by Smart, Edward Adlaf and Gordon Walsh, features some important conclusions, including a statement on the influence of prevention programs on drug use. Smart says that drug education for those involved in heavier use will continue to be a challenge for educational and health authorities.

"Drug prevention programs are having a major impact on the infrequent drug user," he says. "But programs have a more difficult task in reaching the more committed, problematic drug user."

Edward Adlaf says there is a very different profile of drug use, compared to the profile of a decade ago.

"Back then, there were more casual drug users, and there was a smaller percentage of drug users," he says.

The study shows an increase in the percentage of students in the Grades 7 to 13 range who don't use any drugs — including alcohol and tobacco. The percentage of non-users increased to 36.9 per cent this year, compared with 29.2 per cent in 1989 and 17.4 in 1979.

For the 17 drugs surveyed, current rates of use are lower than rates of about a decade ago. Alcohol, the major drug of choice for students, was used by 58.7 per cent of respondents this year, compared with 66.2 per cent in 1989. The percentage of students using cocaine, solvents, non-medical stimulants and tranquilizers, glue, PCP and barbiturates also decreased.

"Students are starting to take drugs at an older age than their counterparts a decade ago," Adlaf adds. From 1977 to 1991, the percentage of drug users trying drugs for the first time before grade 9 dropped for alcohol, tobacco and cannabis.

The latest ARF student drug use survey was conducted in early 1991 among almost 4,000 Ontario students in grades 7, 9, 11 and 13. The results were compared with data from seven surveys the ARF has conducted every two years since 1977 — making the project the longest systematic study of drug use among youth in Canada.

The 1991 study reveals that, among those who drink, there was an increase in the frequency of drinking and of becoming drunk. The percentage of drinkers consuming five or more drinks once a week has also increased — to 5.8 per cent this year, compared with 3.2 in 1981.

The percentage of those reporting police contact because of their drinking also increased. This year, 9.2 per cent of the drinkers surveyed reported encounters with the law, compared with 6.8 per cent in 1981.

The study also shows an increase in the percentage of young smokers using 20 or more cigarettes daily, as well as an increase in the percentage of cannabis users who consume the drug daily.

"The findings of our surveys are in stark contrast to the statistics on drug use among other groups of young people, such as street youth, which involved rates of drug use that are 10 times greater," says Smart.

"Although a promising trend of reduced drug use among students is evident, we can't be complacent," he says. "We're concerned about the increase in 'heavy' users of alcohol and cannabis."

## Letter to the editor

### Some people like car editorials

Dear editor,

I just read the letter to the editor which referred to your car. Some people don't like your car stories, but some of us do. I find it amusing to hear about the strange things that happen with you and your car. To me, it adds a bright spot in the news. Lord knows, there's not much else to smile about in the news today. People can only take so much depressing news.

Thank you for the laugh.

Tina Ball  
Terrace Bay

## Letters to the Editor

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