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Time's a wastin'

If ever there was an argument to be made for an economic development program in the Town of Essex, its time has come. More empty storefronts in the downtown core are popping up than are filling and at least one large main street retailer is preparing to leave town. But help could be on the way.

When changes to the Municipal Act were proclaimed in force on New Year's Day, local governments were handed new powers.

editorial

laurie brett

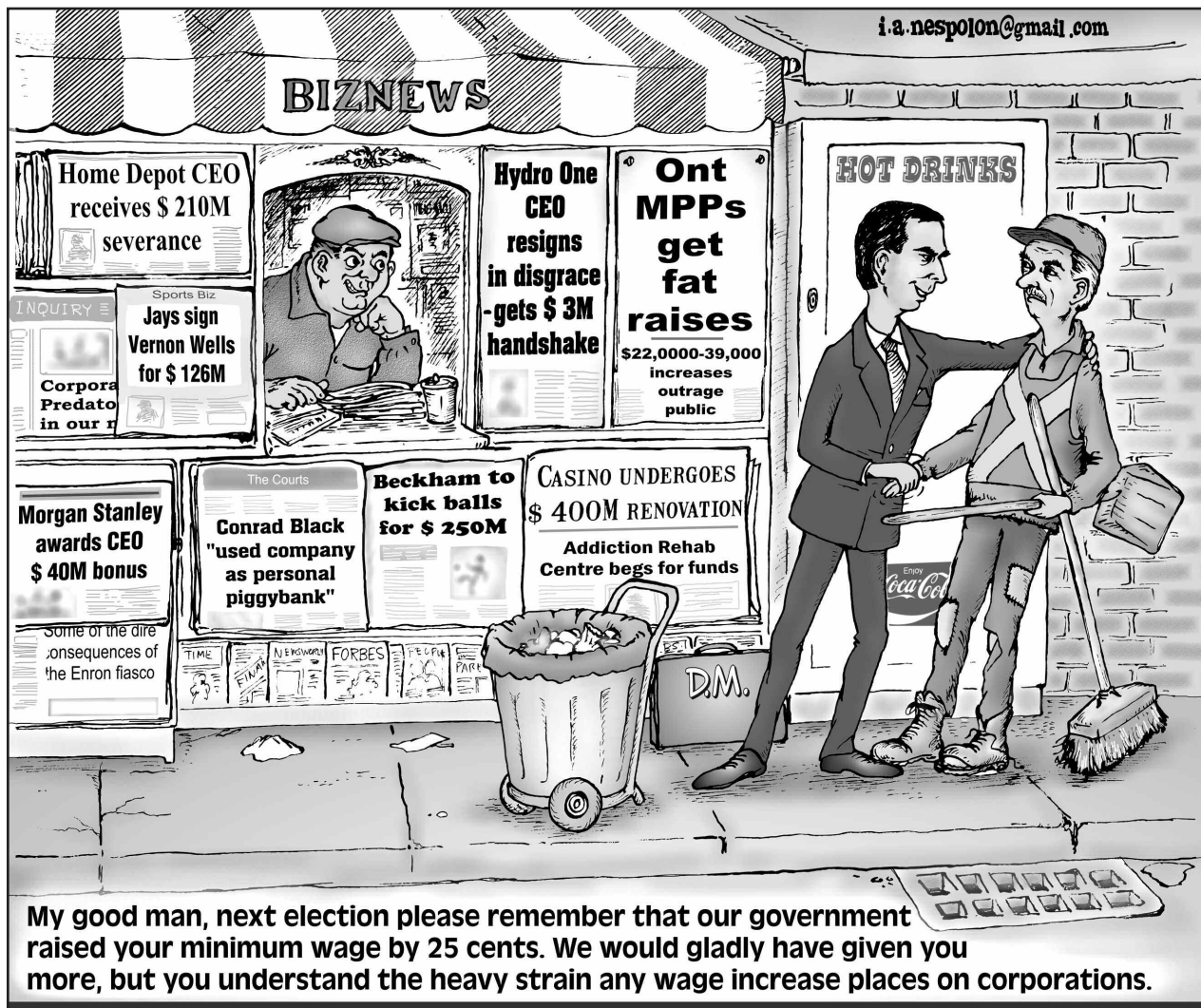
One such power is the authority to offer financial incentives within a community improvement plan. Efforts at revitalizing a downtown area like ours might, for example, include financial incentives for business owners to improve the exterior façades of their businesses with a view to creating a certain look or feel in the downtown commercial area. At the present time, there are no financial incentives for business owners to invest any cash in improving the streetscape.

Changes to the legislation also make it easier for municipalities to establish small business incubator programs – public programs that support startup companies with seed capital, management expertise, office services and even office space. Business incubators are considered to be powerful economic development tools that can create a climate of business success.

Last but not least, changes to the legislation give municipalities the authority to establish their own rules for Business Improvement Areas. If a municipality does not take steps to set the rules, the rules set out in the Municipal Act continue to apply. What that means for our war-torn BIA is uncertain at the moment, but surely it could mean greater autonomy over the governance model for the Essex BIA and a broader vision of what it could be.

The difficulty for the Town of Essex is that these changes require a solid commitment to economic development from the municipality and this is something that we simply aren't seeing. The 2004 report of the ad hoc economic development committee has been all but swept under the rug and no effort is being made to implement the committee's recommendation that an economic development officer be brought onboard. It comes as no surprise that money appears to be the problem. The old adage, "You have to spend money to make money" certainly rings true in the business world. Why should it not also apply to the town?

While the town considers the ins and outs of changing the municipality's name, we're losing precious time that could be better spent seriously analyzing the economic health of our community and developing strategies for improvement. The priorities simply need to change.



Windsor's movers and shakers are plenty upset about a presentation last week at Campbell Baptist Church by Zachariah Anani. He claims to be a former terrorist who has converted from Islam to Christianity. His message warns that Islamic doctrine encourages the murder of Christians and Jews. In today's super-charged world characterized by violence, these are indeed fighting words. Windsor politicians, including Mayor Eddie Francis, lined up to criticize Anani's comments. MP Joe Comartin called it bigotry. But Pastor Donald McKay is adamant and says the presentations will continue.

When a mainline church like Campbell Baptist attaches its name to an event like this, careful consideration must be given to what is going on. There must be support by the church's 350 members, or their board and minister would not have sanctioned it. Does airing such beliefs help or hinder the situa-

tion the world finds itself in, all involving people from two of the globe's great religions? In the past several weeks we have



opinion

bill gay

seen western and civilian casualties mount in Afghanistan and Iraq. Saddam Hussein was hanged on TV. Not since the 1930's and the rise of fascism has the world seen such ferment.

But does it help to lay the blame on a religion or nationality? Is a performance like the one Zachariah Anani gave at Campbell Baptist a "hate crime"? Once you begin to single out everyone who practises a certain

religion as Anani does, it makes it easier to do so again. The western countries have hardly been paragons of virtue through the centuries. The Pope sanctioned both the Crusades, and later, the Inquisition. In the southern United States, segregationists gathered at church each Sunday, just as the people across town they hated so much. Was the murder of four little girls in the 16th Street Baptist Church bombing in 1963 God's responsibility? Is it the fault of the followers of Islam worldwide that caused the tragedy of 9/11?

It is to be hoped that cooler heads will prevail in the situation in Windsor. Setting people against each other due to ethnicity and religion never works. The words of a Jackie de Shannon song from the also turbulent 60's comes to mind, "What the world needs now is love sweet love, it's the only thing there's just too little of." Words as applicable today as then.



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