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Action and reaction

Apparently, I stand corrected. The arena expansion project is not fumbling along, as I suggested in this column last week. Indeed, I have been advised that the Town of Essex fully expects to move ahead in the very near future with one of the three options presented to council at the special meeting held April 20. The clamouring for progress and the drama coming from some frustrated members of the public is,

free press

editorial

laurie brett

apparently, unnecessary. But only time will tell whether this is, in fact, a true assessment.

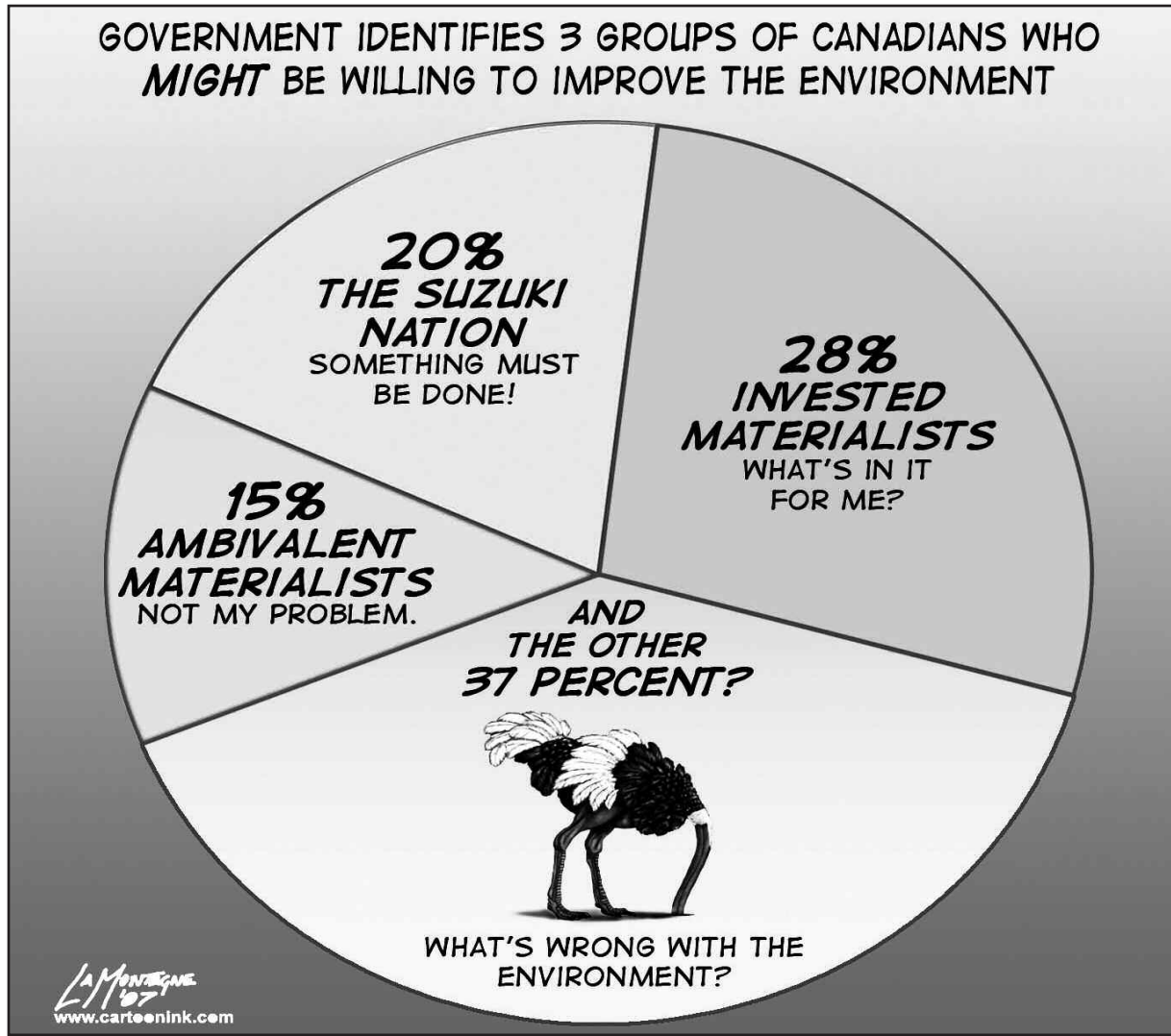
I've also been gently reproached for mis-

understanding the three options currently before council. So, for the sake of clarity, it is incumbent upon me to explain that the \$8.75-million facility proposed by Coun. Paul Innes is not "much like" the \$10-million plan – Option C – would indeed anchor a new ice pad to the existing arena. Option A, on the other hand, envisions two single pads – the existing arena and a new one costing \$10 million that could be twinned in future. Option B is the brand new twin-pad facility that comes with a \$15-million price tag. Mea maxima culpa.

There is no issue that raises more concern in Essex at the present time than the arena issue. Just look at the number of letters to the editor on the subject that appear in this week's Free Press. People have strong views about it and aren't afraid to speak out. Indeed, they believe they have a duty to speak out. Freedom of speech is seldom more effectively used by the average citizen than when he or she is voicing an opinion on an issue that matters to the community.

Curiously, other issues that have been brewing in this community have received very little attention – at least not the kind of attention that spurs citizens to share their thoughts in letters to the editor. The anti-BIA petition, for example, must be tucked away in someone's sock drawer because it has yet to surface in any official capacity. One would have thought that issue would have drawn lots of attention. Similarly, our story on the high cost of municipal policing in Essex should have elicited some concern, but other than the one letter on police wages that we opted not to print (because it was anonymous and we decline to print letters that are unsigned), there was nothing.

For now at least, the arena issue is front and centre when it comes to getting a reaction. And it's no wonder! It's been a long journey to this place in time with a few false starts and some (un)founded fears of derailment. The closer we get to a final decision, the more people are starting to recognize the impact a decision will have, both on the community and on themselves. Let the drama unfold.



Fifty years ago, 1957, was a year to remember.

President Eisenhower sent federal troops into Little Rock Arkansas to ensure the admission of seven black students to an all white high school. The 1957 Ford was outselling Chevrolet nationally, and locally, Essex Farmers sold more Fords than any other dealer in the county. John Diefenbaker toppled the Liberals from power and formed the first Conservative government since R.B. Bennett in 1935. Amherstburg lawyer Richard Thrasher defeated long-time Liberal incumbent Murray Clark in Essex South. Elmer Queen was Mayor of Essex, and Margaret Brown was poised to become the first woman to serve on council.

And almost exactly at this time in 1957, Windsor's Reno Bertoia was challenging the immortal Ted Williams for the American League batting championship. Bertoia, the Detroit Tigers third baseman, was my hero. Imagine, a Canadian from



opinion

bill gay

nearby Windsor presumptuous enough to give "Teddy Ballgame" a run for his money. Reno's challenge faded in mid-season, but everyday I would open the newspaper and look under American League batting stats.

Canadians were scarce in the big leagues of fifty years ago. Bertoia's hero, Hank Biasetti, only played 21 games with Philadelphia in 1949, although he did further distinguish himself by also playing in the early days of the NBA. But Reno Bertoia blazed a trail for other Canadians to follow, like National League all-star Larry Walker and current Blue Jays outfielder

Matt Stairs. And who can forget Canadian lefthander John Hiller? He came right off the Toronto sandlots to join the Detroit Tigers in the mid-sixties, and as a spot starter and reliever, helped pitch them to the AL title in that unforgettable year of 1968.

Following a heart attack, Hiller fought back and was the mainstay of the Detroit bullpen throughout the 70s. When his 10-year career in the big leagues was over, Bertoia earned a university degree. Over the next 30 years, he taught and coached in Windsor at Corpus Christi (now Brennan), Assumption and Holy Names. He served in various capacities over the years with the Tigers and Blue Jays. Reno Bertoia's many honours include election to the Canadian Baseball Hall of Fame and the Windsor-Essex County Sports Hall of Fame.

I found the program from the first Tiger game I ever attended, and it was from that wonderful year of 1957. And there was the name on the Detroit line up, Bertoia, third base.



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