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Comment & Opinions

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EDITORIAL

Write it Canadian

Ask school children who is the head of their country, and too many of them will respond "President Bill Clinton." From Kindergarten children watching Sesame Street who think the last letter of the alphabet is pronounced 'Zee' to older kids who identify with Bart Simpson — Canadian children are inundated by American culture on TV, in videos and books. Yet they may get even more Americanized right at their school desks, if a US firm wins the tender to rewrite Ontario's high school curriculum.

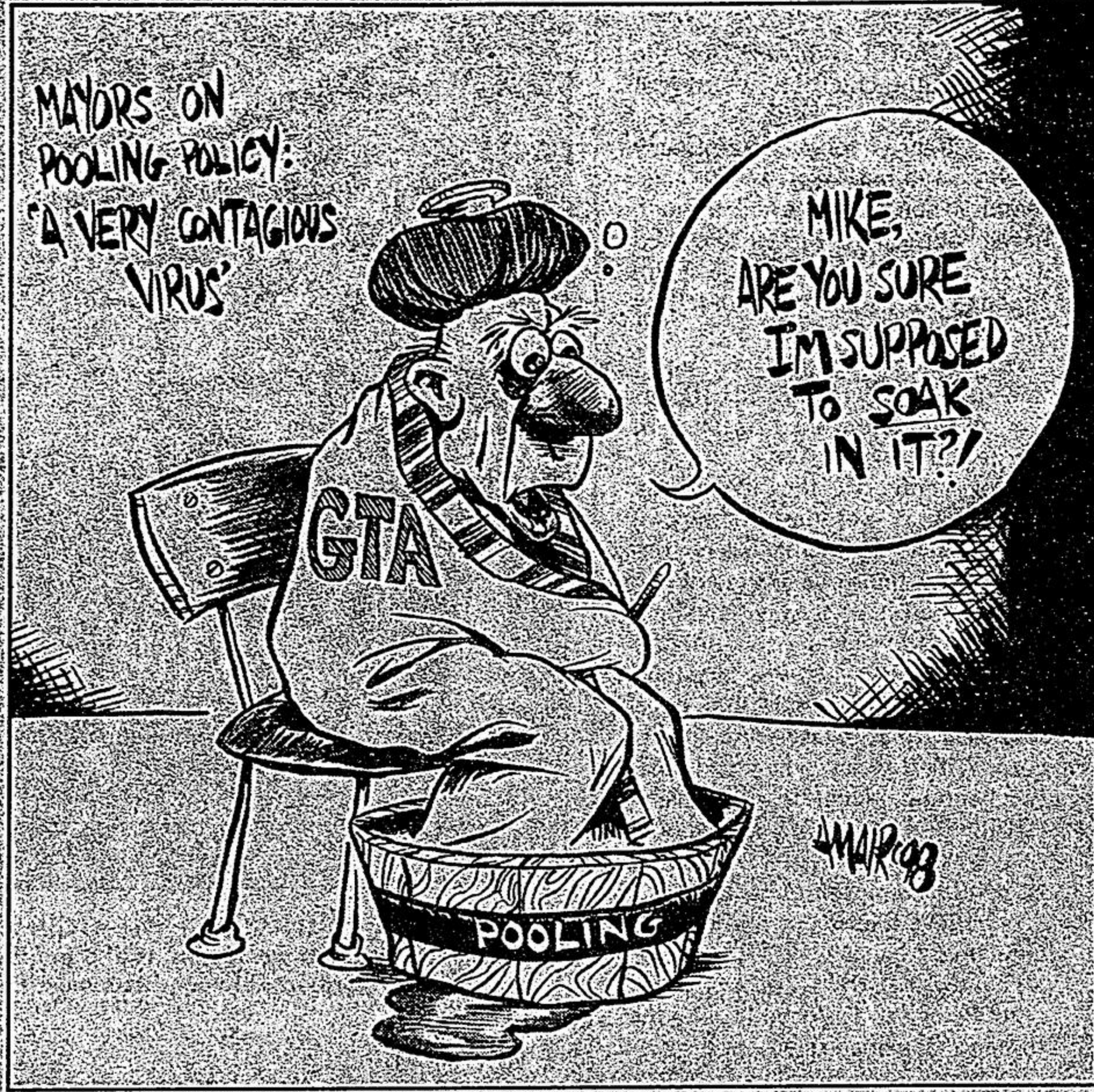
The Ontario government has opened up the curriculum-writing process to private and foreign interests for the first time ever. Critics are denouncing the move as proof that the Tory government is so bent on privatization and saving money that high schools students will soon be seeing red, white and blue.

Ministry of Education officials say the government will have ultimate control of the final curriculum and that half the writing team will be Ontario teachers.

Never mind the fact no other province in Canada has ever developed educational curriculum using private firms, or that Ontario must have a long list of home-grown and highly esteemed curriculum specialists at any number of universities and colleges.

Parents' groups across Ontario have banded together as People for Education. This week the group held a press conference to explain that it is taking inventory of every school, noting such aspects as the kind of programs offered, technology in libraries, class sizes and condition of textbooks. It is highly concerned about this curriculum rewrite, as well.

Surely we don't need American expertise to help our children learn and guide them in learning to think. Let's have a made-in-Ontario curriculum — or at least one made in Canada.



There's a point to scribbling in the space age

Christmas is what — just over a month gone? I find myself looking at this present I found under the tree on Christmas morning. Weeks later I still don't quite know what to make of it.

It is slim as a Rothman's King Size and about the same length, but made of steel — and it's gun-metal black. There are no brand names, in fact there's no discernible writing of any kind on this device, but if you grasp it between thumb and forefinger at each end and apply outward pressure — hey, presto! — the gizmo separates into two pieces and you see that you are holding a ball-point pen, and its cap.

But not just any ball-point pen, no. That's a Fisher Space Pen you've got in your mitt, buddy. I'm impressed. I even sneaked

into one of those upscale calligraphy shops in downtown Vancouver — you know the places I mean — where they sell leather-and-brass-bound "personal secretaries" that do exactly the same job as a spiral note book, except they cost more than the car I drive. They sell pens in there, too. Tony European models mostly, with fourteen-karat gold nibs and the heft of an LAPD riot control billy.

But I looked around and eventually I found the Fisher Space Pen as well, retailing for about \$35. I was impressed. In fact, as a guy who never voluntarily lays out more than 99 cents for a writing utensil, I was utterly dumfounded. What could possibly make this little nondescript shaft in my hand worth 35 bucks?

Fortunately, my Christmas pre-



Basic Black

Arthur Black

sent came with double wrapping. The outer layer was standard Christmas foil, but the pen itself was swaddled lovingly in two pages of glowing information that told me all about the origins of the fabulous Fisher Space Pen that Would Make Me The Envy of My Peers.

That's where I discovered that my tiny gift pen is nitrogen-powered — which is to say the ink is under pressure. This, my little info sheet informs me, makes it possible for the ink to be forced past the tungsten-carbide ball, specially designed to withstand corrosion, etc., etc.

Not just any old ink either. No sir, the ink in the Fisher Space Pen is thixotropic — which means that it won't leak or gob up like the 99-cent clunkers I usually favour.

According to my info sheet, the revolving tungsten-carbide ball liquifies the thixotropic ink, which allows the Fisher Space Pen to write smoothly.

Wonderful. But isn't that quite a lot of fuss for something I'm going to use to jot down my grocery list?

Well, that's the point. The Fisher Space Pen wasn't developed for me — it was created for astronauts.

NASA nabobs didn't get too far into the Space Travel Game before they realized that standard Grand and Toy fountain or ball-point pens just couldn't cut it out there. Ord-

nary pens wouldn't perform satisfactorily in the weightless, zero-gravity environment of a space capsule.

So NASA decided to invent an all-new writing device. They took their problem to a contractor by the name of Paul Fisher. Mister Fisher went to work and came up with the Fisher Space Pen.

And all for a mere \$2-million US in research.

You read right. But, hey — cutting-edge, space-age technology doesn't come cheap, you know. We're just fortunate that NASA didn't pay any attention to that German crank who responded to their original request for a new invention.

The German inventor read the NASA specs for their proposed "lithographic transmission system" as NASA called it. How the new device had to be a state-of-the-art writing utensil that was lightweight, could perform in below-freezing temperatures or in extremely hot surroundings. It had to be able to write at any angle, even upside-down, and it had to be able to do all this in a complete vacuum.

What's more, insisted NASA, this revolutionary breakthrough in writing technology would need to come with a relatively limitless supply of ink or fuel or ribbon or whatever it used to record astronauts scribbles out in deep space.

The German inventor read the requirements, shook his head grunted and dashed off a five-word telegram. The next morning at headquarters, NASA brass ripped open the telegram to read: "HAVE YOU TRIED A PENCIL?"

Send messages to Olympic athletes

Dear Editor,
The 1998 Winter Olympics in Nagano are just around the corner and people in communities across Ontario are eagerly looking for ways to get involved in the spirit of the Games.

People in your community can enhance their Olympic experience without leaving home.

The Bell Olympic Connections Line offers people an opportunity to directly share in the emotions of the Olympics.

By calling 1-888-439-TEAM

LETTERS

(8326) Olympic well-wishers can leave messages of encouragement for their favourite Canadian athletes in Nagano. Messages will be transcribed and sent via the Internet to special e-mail addresses created for athletes and accessed at the Olympic Village.

Kathy Pashby
Bell Canada

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