

Comment & Opinions

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EDITORIAL

Charest has his work cut out

Jean Charest. Giant Killer.
That's the role his country, his party and his colleagues have thrust upon the national Progressive Conservative leader. This week, Charest accepted the nomination for leader of the Quebec provincial Liberals to do battle with Lucien Bouchard.

Charest has been seen as the only person to beat the Parti Quebecois in an upcoming provincial election. Polls demonstrate that this is certainly the case, the latest indicated Charest would capture 53 per cent of the vote to Bouchard's 39 per cent.

What choice did Charest have? None, as far as we can tell. Had he declined the offer, the what-if-factor would have been almost too much to bear, and his federal status would have been seriously jeopardized by Quebecers who would have felt abandoned. It was really the only move he could have made.

The real test will not be if Charest can win the election, that is his for the taking. It will be what he does to ensure the demise of the separatist movement, and to bring Quebec into the constitutional fold.

We wish him every success, naturally.



Canada ignored in happiness survey

Canada's bird ought to be the grouse.

~Anonymous

Old Anon was on to something there. Has there ever been a nation on the face of the earth that did more complaining? We grouse about the GST. We moan about the fate of Canadian hockey. We yammer and mewl about Ottawa potholes, then banks, big cities, the cost of living, the seal hunt, too many immigrants, not enough immigrants.

We fill the pages of our newspapers with letters to the editor about the price at the gas pump, the lineups at the hospital, crummy television from the US and the plight of the beluga.

And of course, there's the weather. Every Canadian worth his Stanfield trap-door long johns can deliver a 20-minute peroration on the lousy Canadian weather.

Canadian winters are...challenging. The rest of the world doesn't call us "frostbacks" for nothing.

No question about it: Canada is just too imperfect to support life and foster happiness.

So I put it to you: where in the world would you move to be happy?

At first glance, the answer seems obvious. Somewhere with lots of sunshine and perpetual blue skies.

A lot of winter-weary Canucks do go that route — at least for short breaks. There are trailer parks and beach villas in Texas, Arizona, and other southern US states that, come December, fly more Canadian flags than even Don Cherry could stand.

But those are tourists, not citizens. Most of those "snowbirds" fly back north with the geese each spring.

So I put the question again: where on earth would a person move to have the best chance of happiness?

You're not going to believe the answer. Iceland.

I am not suffering from cabin fever and I haven't been into Grandma's blackberry cordial. Ruut Veenhoven, a Dutch psychologist, wondered where the happiest people on earth call home. Veenhoven analyzed longevity figures from almost every nation.

Then the professor initiated follow-up public opinion polls that delved into quality of life. The findings were used to calculate how many years of happiness an average citizen could expect.

Some of the findings are not eyebrow-lifting. The citizens of What's Left of Russia can expect only 34.5 years of relative bliss. Americans came



Basic Black
Arthur Black

in with 57.8 years. Switzerland took third place with an average happiness expectancy quotient of 59.8 years, and contrary to its sour reputation, frigid, gloomy old Sweden emerged as the second most blissful nation. According to Veenhoven, Swedes can expect, on average, to experience 61.5 years of good times. Iceland, as I said, was first with an average of 62 happy years per lifetime.

Aha, you say, but where does Canada rate in the Delirium Sweepstakes? Good question. Professor Veenhoven didn't produce any statistics for Canada.

Perhaps he unconsciously assumed that Canada is just an extension of upper New York state.

I prefer another explanation. I like to think that Canada is so far ahead in the happiness category that the professor deliberately left us out so as not to skew the results and make all other countries hopelessly jealous. After all, the United Nations declared Canada the best place to live in the world three years in a row. We must be doing something right. I wish someone would tell Professor Veenhoven.

And then I wish they'd tell Quebec

Dementia deserves discretion

Dear Editor,

As a senior citizen I feel I must respond to your front page headline and article in *The Tribune* of March 24, "Region dementia cases to triple by year 2021".

I cannot contest the facts, but it seems we (seniors) are assumed to be irrelevant to the statements you express — or are already victims of the conditions you describe. Maybe we shouldn't read your publication.

Do we not deserve the care and consideration given a child when faced with a needle, who is reassured that he/she will not get sick — an assurance which can't be offered to us?

I'm not sure who is being reminded of this situation. Those of us who are centred out can't worry about it and the rest of us won't be helped by worrying. Or is it for our families to be posed with this responsibility?

Please, whatever your intention in

LETTERS

setting down this information I hope it was not to be published in this way.

Make books a priority in library expansion

Dear Editor,

I was filled with great joy when I read about the two million dollar library project (March 12, "Library expansion tops 2M").

I had visions of thousands of new books until I read the fine print of how the money will be spent.

Only three quarters of one per cent (.75 percent) of the expansion budget is for new books.

Some serious discretion is required in dealing with this kind of material.

P.S. — Maybe we expect some positive follow-up which would offer something hopeful for future seniors?

E. Skinner

Since the most important aspect of a library is books, I don't think it would be too extravagant to ask for ten per cent of this budget to be allotted for books.

I'd rather browse through an old barn full of interesting books than a modern new building that is half empty with outdated books.

P. Puhl
Stouffville

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While we endeavor to print as many letters as possible, we regret that not all letters may be printed.