

Comment & Opinions

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OPINION

MPs: the power of deception

As our long-suffering MPs do their best to put a positive spin on their proposed pay hikes, they will undoubtedly fall back on several tried and true methods of deceiving the public.



View Point

Doug Devine

Deception No. 1: Their pay has been frozen since 1991. The truth: The first portion of the yet-to-be-approved pay hike was secretly implemented last January.

Deception No. 2: The basic salary for an MP is just \$64,400 — hardly an extravagant amount for the men and women entrusted with leading our proud nation.

The truth: When tax-free allowances are factored in, including a \$6,000 housing allowance, our MPs are paid the equivalent of a fully-taxed income of \$119,000 — easily placing them among the top 10 per cent of incomes in the country.

Deception No. 3: The new pay package will only increase MP salaries by two per cent a year for the next four years, for a total raise of about 10 per cent — well in keeping with the current average industrial wage hikes of 2.5 per cent a year.

The truth: Because that two per cent raise is also being applied to the \$21,300 tax-free allowance, and the housing allowance is being doubled to \$12,000, the total taxable value of an MP's salary will be \$140,000 at the end of the four years — an increase of 17.65 per cent, or about 4.4 per cent a year, almost double the average industrial wage hike.

Prime Minister Jean Chretien is correct in pointing out the new salary simply brings MPs in line with other top public servants, such as police chiefs and hospital presidents.

But his \$140,000 argument only makes sense if you accept the concept that the duties of a backbench MP are comparable to those of top executives, since cabinet ministers and party leaders are paid significantly more than an MP, and since middle managers in our hospitals and police forces are paid considerably less than chiefs and presidents.

Deception No. 4: The pay hike has been recommended by an all-party committee and there's little the average MP can do about it if the majority of the House of Commons approves it.

The truth: Chretien himself has removed this crutch, suggesting any MP who doesn't want the pay hike can simply opt out.

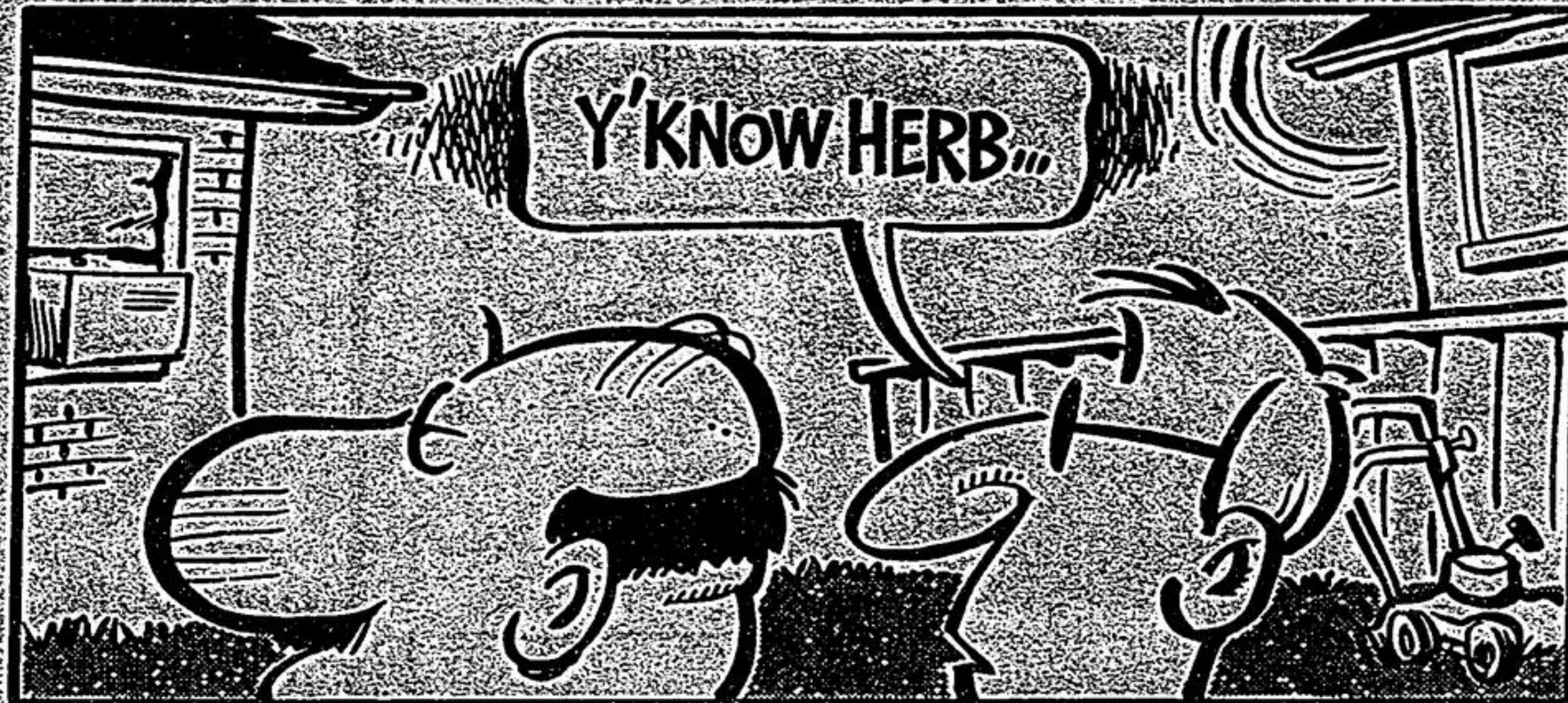
So far, only Liberal MP Guy St. Julien has taken Chretien's bait, telling government officials to apply his salary increase to the national debt instead.

Others, including NDP Leader Alexa McDonough, say they will give their raises to charity.

It's now up to average Canadians to convince the other 300 MPs to follow St. Julien's lead.

To the average Canadian, the arguments against a pay hike are vast and varied, including the fact Canadians remain among the most heavily taxed people in the world, our CPP payments are skyrocketing due to past government mismanagement, and our national debt remains an obscene blight on the future of our children and grandchildren. But perhaps the best argument against the pay hike is the simple fact our MPs were just elected last year. By running for office, they willingly accepted the conditions of the job, including the current salary.

So even if a salary adjustment is warranted, it should only take effect after the next election.



Bad move cancelling shop, family studies

LETTERS

Dear Editor,

I have been a firm supporter of the Harris government policies.

I had the recent occasion to be at a local school where I was shocked to find that the woodworking shop and family studies programs were being cancelled.

I would say that cancelling these courses does not make Common Sense.

There are times when the bureaucracy is not famous for intelligent decisions and the so-called slash and savings are not conducive to the society in which we

now live.

As we all know, today many children come from single family homes and how else are a lot of these children going to learn ordinary, everyday maintenance skills?

Naturally, we would all like the children to be computer whizzes, but down to earth skills are also important.

Politicians please take note in balancing the books and saving money, for we, the taxpayers, don't want to be saving at the price of basic instructions being denied to children.

I hope the bureaucracy will take the time to think again.

Patricia Stauderman

Stouffville Lions say thanks to participants of King roast

Dear Editor,

On behalf of the Lions Club of Stouffville, I would like to thank those in the community for their participation and support in the roast of (former regional chairman) Eldred King.

This was a night to honour one of our past mayors and longest-running regional chair.

We bestowed a Melvin Jones Fellowship to King, which is the highest Lion award that one can present to a citizen.

Special thanks also to piper Cameron MacKenzie, classical guitarist Michael Jammer, and the roasters Mayor Wayne

Emmerson, Jim Thomas, and Lion Tom Winters.

As well, thanks to Tom Brillinger and Angie's Eatery.

The Stouffville Lions do volunteer work for the betterment of the community, working with the blind and humanitarian needs, to name a few.

It is through the help, support and participation of the community that we are able to succeed in our tasks.

David Barthau
Lion President

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