

Stouffville Tribune

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EDITORIAL

Regional tax rebates set dangerous precedent

It's easy to sympathize with business owners in York Region who face tax hikes of as much as 300 per cent because of the province's new property assessment system.

In many cases, it's the small neighbourhood store getting hit with a massive increase, an increase that could put it out of business.

Understandably, the business community is demanding more than sympathy — our businesses need tax relief.

The solution on the table at York Region council this afternoon, however, seems imprudent to say the least.

Councillors are suggesting they will provide a one-time rebate to businesses facing large tax increases. Depending on the conditions of the rebate, it could cost between \$622,000 and \$3.87 million.

Councillors have no idea where they will find this money but are hoping the province might refund some of its education taxes — a suggestion the province has flatly rejected.

And recent statements by the Canadian Federation of Independent Business suggests the region shouldn't trust the province to provide any help.

Citing a Finance Ministry claim that York Region came out \$27 million ahead from provincial downloading, the business lobby group says the region can afford to provide rebates from its own coffers.

Regional officials vehemently deny the claim. According to Ed Hankins, the region's financial planner, York Region broke even on downloading. There is no pot of money. And yet, regional politicians are considering offering business tax rebates — even though they are aware that such a move would only lead to more political fallout.

As Aurora Mayor Tim Jones said, homeowners will immediately demand similar help for their equally severe tax increases.

In Richmond Hill alone, the tax bills of 2,000 homeowners have doubled this year. These people and their counterparts in every York Region municipality deserve a break just as much as the business owner down the street.

The problem isn't that the government introduced a province-wide reassessment, it's that the system was reformed so hastily that property owners had no time to prepare for radical changes to their tax bills.

Had the changes been phased in, business people could have planned for the tax hikes.

But those decisions were in the province's hands. The province has offered a "tool kit" to mitigate the impact of reassessment, but according to regional officials, these options are virtually useless in York Region.

That's because the tool kit was designed to meet Toronto's needs — because Toronto Mayor Mel Lastman demanded the province solve his tax problems. And that should be a lesson to York Region politicians.

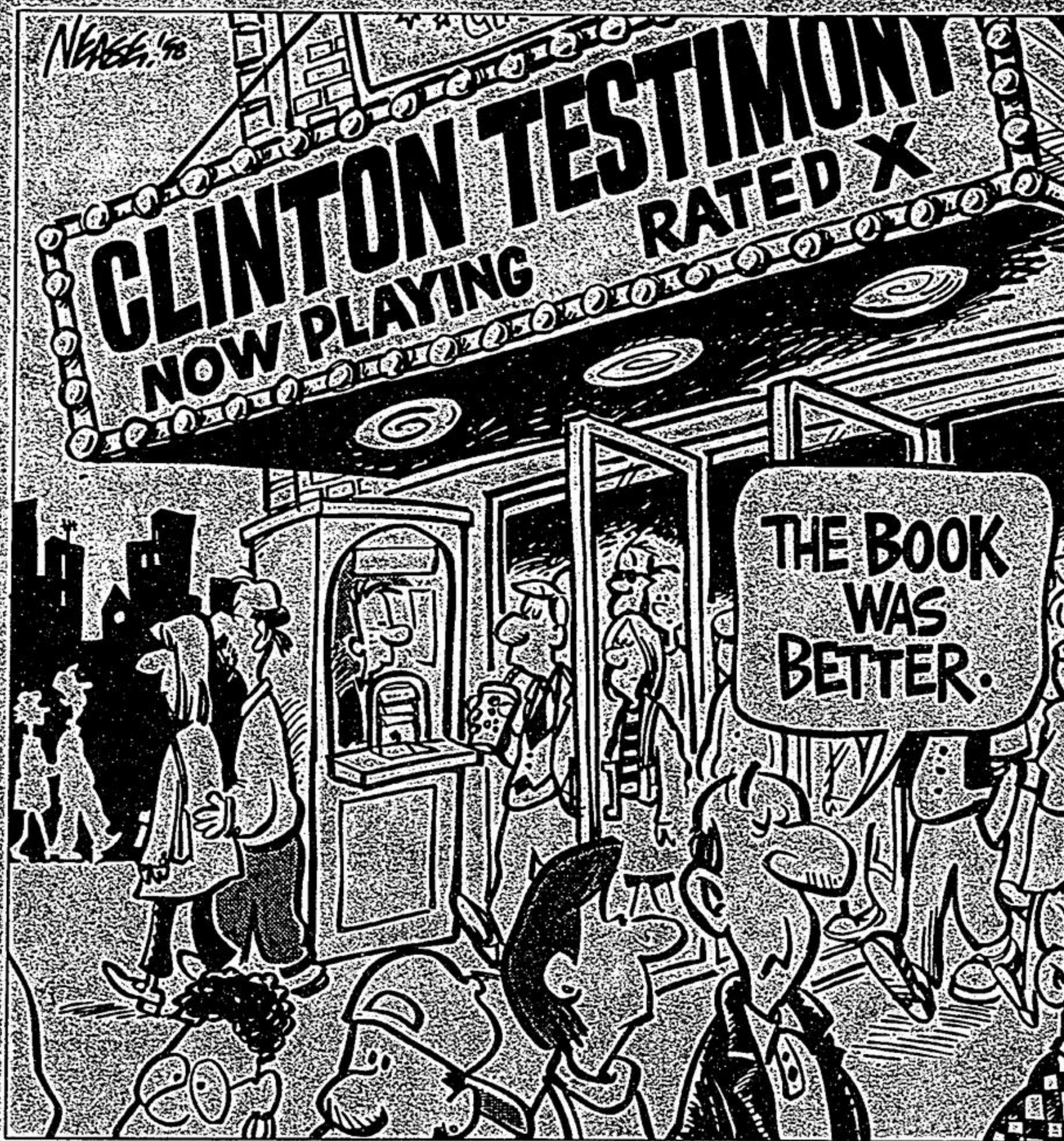
When confronted with outrageous residential tax increases, Lastman didn't offer to pay for rebates out of his own pocket. He didn't spend money in the hope the province would ride to his rescue.

He raised the roof. He griped and complained and whined to anyone who would listen until the province came through for him.

That may seem undignified, but if it worked for Lastman, it ought to work here.

After all, every MPP in this region is a Tory. If Mike Harris wants to get re-elected, he needs the support of York Region, especially the business community.

OPINION



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Private schooling not better than public system: teacher

Louis-Paul Comire makes some drastic errors in his argument against publicly-funded school teachers and our current labour actions in his letter entitled 'Students' rights paramount' in the Sept. 8 Tribune.

First, his suggestion the savings, which may accrue from firing teachers who go on strike, be provided to parents to help pay for private school education ignores the cost of private education.

If each of my 36 students took an equal portion of my annual salary, they would each get just over \$1,500.

This doesn't come anywhere close to paying for private schooling. They would each need about six to 10 times this amount.

Second, based on research using student achievement tests and university performance, private school students do not outperform public school students.

It is a myth private education is better than that available in public schools.

Finally, the data on student achievement also shows there are positive correlations between student performance and teacher experience, salary, and strong collective bargaining. To negate these factors, as the (Premier Mike) Harris government is trying to do, is to harm the type of quality education Comire would appear to desire for all students.

STEVE BULL
STOUFFVILLE

Private school teachers best

Imagine a school where teachers never go on strike. There is no union. Imagine a school where the main purpose for teaching is the joy of being involved with children's learning.

Such a school exists, a private school supported solely by parents. Parents who do not all have double incomes, yet pay public school taxes, too. Parents who give high priority to their children's school years. In our school, the teachers believe that children are a gift of God and treat them as such.

Our teachers dress professionally. They are well experienced. Our teachers are concerned about academic skills without putting aside the extra-curricular endeavours of the students and parents.

Our teachers give superiority to the needs of the students over their own. By example, after several years, they now have a small staff washroom. By comparison to others, their salary is considerably less. They have the respect of students and parents.

For reasons of authenticity alone, I name the school — the Stouffville Christian School. I have not had experience with other school systems, but I do know of good teachers employed there. It seems to me it is not the teachers who have a disregard for the students, rather a union which stirs the contented into a few discontented.

Perhaps some school boards could take a lesson from some private schools.

TINA BACHAND
MARKHAM



Doug Devine

Teachers set to walk into the line of fire

Maybe Mike Harris and his fellow teacher-bashers have a point after all.

Clearly something is wrong with our education system since even university graduates don't seem to have a firm grasp of either English or politics — including such basic terms as majority rule, democratic rights, representative and leadership. How else can York Region teachers explain the bizarre set of circumstances playing out in elementary schools?

The elementary teachers' union has vowed not to return to bargaining until after it gets a strike mandate from the teachers, who are scheduled to vote next Monday and Tuesday.

"Once we establish a strike vote, no problem. But we will not return to the table until then," said Harold Vigoda, the chief negotiator appointed by the union's provincial office.

But Vigoda's tough talk may not be exactly indicative of the general mood of our teachers, according to the union's local president, Pam Gillan.

"I know our teachers would like to get back to the table as soon as possible," she said.

"I think our members are very aware of the fact decisions are out of our control. There is a feeling that decisions are being made for us."

Call me naive, if you must, but "Huh?"

If the majority of the teachers in a democratic union want their representatives to return to the bargaining table before taking a strike vote, shouldn't the leaders adhere to the majority's democratic rights and return to the table?

The fact they aren't has made it clear the union head office is calling the shots.

Union leaders don't want these issues cleared up, they want a strike vote so they can add York Region elementary teachers to the long list of those battling the Tories over Bill 160.

In other words, this dispute is not about local students or teachers. It has moved, lock, stock and barrel into the political ring — exactly what the teacher bashers have insisted all along.

Unless our local elementary teachers want to become poster fodder for Harris supporters, they had better stand up to their provincial union leaders. Otherwise, a strike by York's public elementary teachers will be just as inevitable and just as indefensible as the now, three-week-old, walkout by York's Catholic teachers.

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