

Stouffville Tribune

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EDITORIAL

Thorne's dismissal cause for concern

Perhaps Dr. Jim Maclean, acting president of Markham Stouffville Hospital, best sums up our sentiments over the province's dismissal of Dr. Carter Thorne as chairperson of the district health council. "I think it's a shame," he told us last week. "I think Carter was an excellent chair for the DHC and a real visionary, committed to high-quality health care. This does a real disservice to all of York Region and Simcoe County."

We couldn't agree more. And we can't stop asking ourselves why on earth the province would remove such a qualified, talented and committed individual from a job he is dedicated to doing well for York and Simcoe residents.

Just think about Thorne's qualifications. He created and operates an innovative, full-care arthritis program for York County Hospital, with a variety of partners including dietitians and pharmacists, that is unparalleled outside Toronto.

The program provides full-service care and support for his patients. And he does it on a budget of about \$300,000 — chopped by 25 per cent due to cutbacks. Thorne's work on this program alone demonstrates specific skills that would serve the health council, the public and the province — he's innovative, he's cognizant of the need to use dollars wisely and he's efficient.

Thorne is also a true patient advocate. Under his leadership, the health council has expressed concern to Health Minister Elizabeth Witmer about provincial funding delays and about the process behind her selection of York County Hospital as the regional cardiac centre. He pointed out the decision was made without consulting the DHC, and came just as the health council was starting its own review of where the service would best be located.

Thorne also spoke out strongly last fall about a long list of provincial funding promises that still hadn't come to fruition — and the impact those funding delays were having on local hospitals and their patients.

Despite Thorne's obvious dedication to improving health care, or perhaps because of it, when his two-year appointment to the DHC expired last month, Witmer decided not to renew it. When DHC director Graham Constantine asked ministry officials about the decision, he was told it was "the minister's prerogative."

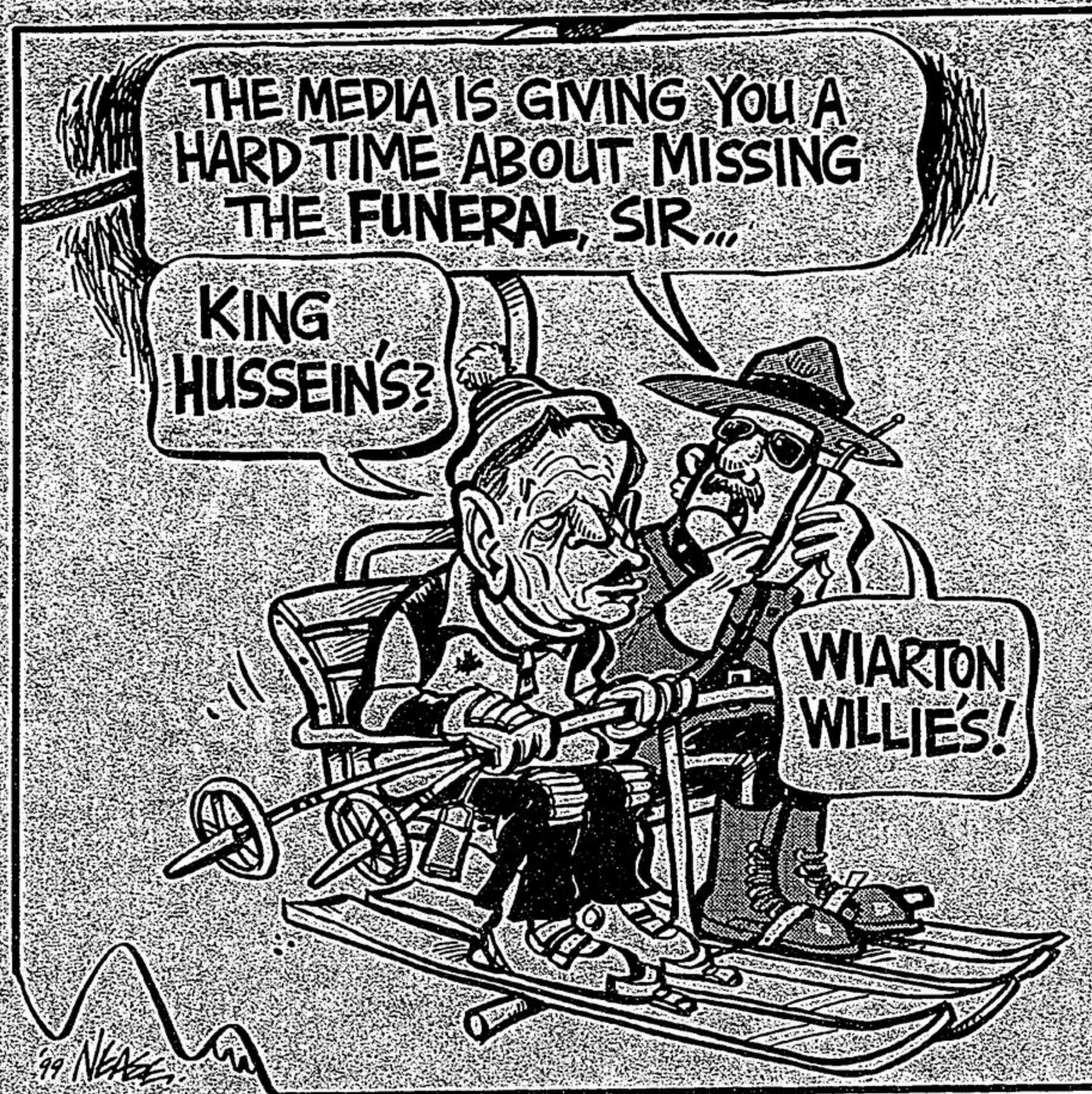
But considering the DHC has only 14 representatives on its board, when 20 is the desired number, and is actively seeking qualified representatives to fill those spots, and considering Thorne has the skills and the personality to be a strong health care advocate for residents and doctors, and considering that health care is a sensitive issue for the provincial government, it seems pretty obvious Witmer's decision to get rid of Thorne is pure politics.

Witmer, and York Region's four Tory MPPs, must be asked to explain why such a highly qualified member of the DHC has been turfed for simply questioning the government's actions — arguably the very role residents should expect of their DHC.

The DHC must strongly protest Thorne's removal, demand his return. That's the step the council members should have taken when they met Monday — they should have taken a tough stand, even though they may legitimately fear the same repercussions that Carter Thorne has experienced.

Without people who know what it's like to provide health care on a shoestring working on our behalf at the District Health Council, we cannot be guaranteed quality service. We need Dr. Carter Thorne where he belongs — acting as our advocate.

OPINION



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Freedom of expression abused by 'fine citizenry'

I was present at the council meeting on Feb. 2, and feel compelled to voice my disgust at the antics of some of our supposedly fine citizenry.

While I would be at the front of any line in support of freedom of expression, the obvious abuse of this privilege by one or two of the ringleaders of the anti-pool/library project is unacceptable.

Their apparent leader appeared to be far more interested in grandstanding for his collection of supporters than troubling to deal with any concrete issues.

Others rose to take advantage of the platform, mostly to engage in a cowardly display of mudslinging.

Opponents also made attempts to verbally intimidate one lady who wished to speak in favour of the pool.

To this hostile audience, she bravely read out a letter that she had written to local papers in support of the project.

It was probably the only evidence presented that showed any real research.

I am sure that the projects' opponents are today proud of the fact that they forced her to leave in tears.

STUART LEIGH
GORMLEY

Country club mentality has infected council

The recent decision by town council

to approve the pool/library complex is a decision that provides three valuable lessons.

The first lesson is that, to our council, heritage does not matter.

The new library is better than the old, the new baseball diamonds will be better than the old ones and the new covered pool will be better than the old uncovered one.

In short, the new and bigger is better than the old and established.

The second lesson is that if residents want to get serious about opposing council on certain issues, we are going to have to get more actively involved with our residents' associations and we are going to have to get our residents' associations to work with each other.

An established coalition of residents or residents' associations across Whitchurch-Stouffville can stay in touch with the needs of residents and communicate those needs to council.

More importantly, an organized group can mobilize resources in the event that council makes decisions contrary to the public interest.

The third lesson is that the vision for this town extends only as far as the next council meeting.

Last year we heard council arguing for a new vision of "country close to the city."

Now, we have two projects moving forward — 1,000 homes in Gormley and the pool/library complex — that clearly reflect council's new but unstated vision of city close to the country club.

JIM W. PRIEBE
STOUFFVILLE



Doug Devine

Traffic meltdown ahead for GTA residents

Attention York Region commuters: If you drive more than 20 minutes to work, you have three choices:

- Quit your job immediately and look for work closer to home — preferably within walking distance.
- Sell your house immediately and move closer to your work — again, preferably within walking distance.
- Get out of the GTA completely — Vancouver's nice this time of year.

These options may not seem very attractive right now, but trust me, within about 10 years (15 at the most) you'll be admired for your foresight.

The reason for such drastic action is the total, GTA-wide traffic gridlock that now appears all but inevitable.

According to a TV news report this week, the province is sitting on a confidential report that confirms the GTA's already strained transportation network is headed for total meltdown, as it tries to cope with a 55-per cent increase in traffic over the next 20 years.

For anyone still counting on traffic planners and politicians to avoid such an economic calamity, you may want to consider a few realities.

York Region politicians have been discussing, but mostly dismissing, the need for a co-ordinated regional transit system for at least five years.

When Vaughan Mayor Lorna Jackson suggested we need to revive plans to extend Toronto's subway system into York Region, Markham Mayor Don Cousens suggested she was "smoking on an empty pipe."

As disheartening as Cousens' comment is, it unfortunately reflects the cold, hard truth about the future of transit in York Region, thanks in a large part to Premier Mike Harris.

That's because transit and roads are now the sole responsibility of regional taxpayers, under Harris' tax restructuring scheme — the one that was supposed to save us all from huge property tax hikes due to the spiralling costs of education.

Never mind that demographic guru David Foot predicts a decline in education demands over the next decade or so.

As a result of restructuring, local taxpayers are facing a choice between wall-to-wall gridlock or massive tax hikes to pay for major improvements to our road and transit network.

You don't suppose Harris knew all this was coming in the first place, do you?

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