

Stouffville Tribune

A Metroland community newspaper
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EDITORIAL

Budget a weak response to health care crisis

In all likelihood, the Liberal government hopes Tuesday's federal budget will be seen by Canadians as a panacea for curing the ills of the nation's health care system.

They know Canadians have concerns about access to and the availability of quality health care in the nation and, so, it's good politics to make it the focal point of the budget.

Frankly, it's still a pretty weak response and it's unfortunate there isn't anything else in the budget document to get excited about.

Finance Minister Paul Martin is trying to pare down a \$12-billion budget surplus, by re-investing it in health care and research and by making minor tax cuts for Canadians.

Anything that he doesn't allocate for spending by the fall must be applied to the country's \$580-billion debt, something the finance minister seems reluctant to do.

The tax cuts include a removal of the 3-per-cent surtax on those who earn more than \$50,000 annually and an increase in the basic personal exemption to \$675 to help out low-income Canadians.

There's also some money for industrial research and development, about \$1.8 billion.

And then there are the health care numbers — \$3.5 billion to solve pressing problems in the health care system.

Transfer payments will rise from this year's \$12.5 billion to \$14.5 billion in 1999-2000, then to \$15 billion for each of the subsequent three years.

PROVINCES ARE NOT RECEIVING ENOUGH

But those numbers, when you examine them closely, don't offer the cure the provinces require.

The increased payments will only bring federal health care spending to the same levels as 1995.

It's part of the health and social transfer, which the Liberals cut during their mandate.

The payments also don't take into account such issues as our aging population, new technological needs, higher compensation for health care professionals and a safer, new blood system to manage.

So what do we have?

In truth, we have made marginal gains in health care allocations, but it's a far cry from what the provinces need to meet the demands of their citizens.

And we still won't be making a dent in the federal debt.

LIBERALS ARE TREADING WATER

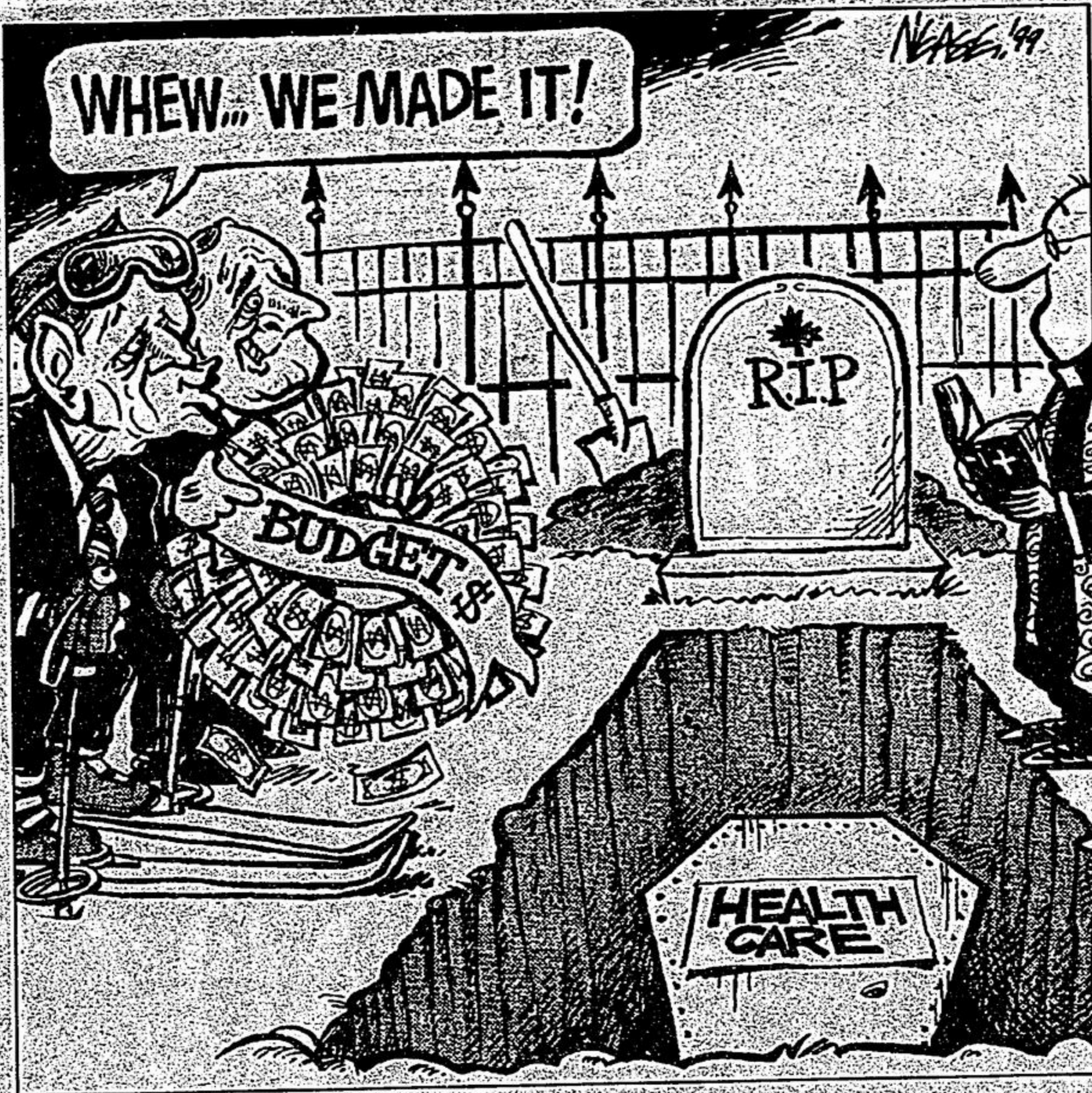
The Liberals are merely treading water — making tiny steps in politically sensitive directions to keep the majority of Canadians relatively happy until it's election time once again.

From the government's standpoint, it's a straightforward recipe for success — don't do too much, don't promise too much, don't take big risks, don't be innovative, creative or dynamic in your approach to managing the money.

The federal Liberals are just trying to keep everyone, if not happy, complacent with your decisions and your progress.

That's what this budget is all about — there's not much to cheer about in it, but there's not much to jeer, either.

OPINION



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Trapping common sense

How courageous of the *Stouffville Tribune* to feature an article on the rise of the coyote population in York Region (Feb. 9) and the inherent dangers this brings to family, children and pets.

In the days of common sense, coyotes were trapped without a problem, their hides used for fur, income was earned, taxes were paid and communities were safe.

However, resident Peter Barnett's bichon friese being killed by a coyote is the very sort of tragedy that we must get used to because we have turned our backs on our heritage, our common sense, and have let animal rights activists make trapper and hunter-bashing a national sport.

I wonder how many more unfortunate incidents such as this one will have to be experienced before we have the intelligence to force politicians to stop taking away our culture and heritage, and stop endangering our families.

As the years go by, the tragedies will increase as nuisance populations of bears, wolves, raccoons and coyotes grow to dangerous levels due to the limitation and restriction of hunting.

The raccoons will be a great concern down the road, as rabies in this species move north into Canada.

It's time to show up in Environment Minister John Snobelen's office and demand the common sense revolution we were promised.

SYLVIA MCFARLAND
MARKHAM

Hospital deserves its accreditation

As a senior I have had several occasions when I needed the facilities and services of Markham Stouffville Hospital, as have many of my friends who are also members of the seniors club on Water Street.

I have had the best of care from doctors and nursing staff at the hospital and hear the same complimentary remarks from my friends.

My thanks go to Drs. Alan Ing, Henry Solow and Michael Selucky and all the nurses and staff for their care and understanding.

The hospital richly deserves the excellent accreditation it has been awarded.

Thanks for all you do, for so many.

LUCILLE SCHOFIELD
MARKHAM

Not all cats are a nuisance to neighbours

My neighbours have cats. They do not roam. They do not howl. They do not kill the birds who come to our bird feeders.

They're tethered in the backyard for some part of the day in the good weather, they're indoors the rest of time.

Linda and Ken are good neighbours, don't you wish everybody was?

PHILL GILES
MARKHAM



Doug Devine

Helicopter would help police avoid dangerous chases

Predictably, the tragic weekend crash involving a fleeing criminal has renewed calls to ban police chases.

Sarah Bowman, an innocent 21-year-old university student, remains in critical condition after her car was T-boned by a driver who ran a red light while fleeing Peel Regional Police early Sunday.

But, a report released Friday by the Solicitor General concludes banning police chases doesn't make sense — unless we want to declare open season on crime.

The report does include many recommendations on how to make chases safer, less frequent and more successful.

Three ideas stand out as the most encouraging.

First, equip all police cruisers with tire-puncturing spike belts, giving officers a safer method of stopping a fleeing car.

Second, study the impact a helicopter may have on police chases, giving officers a safer method of tracking fleeing suspects.

One GTA-wide police helicopter would be sufficient, a project that should become the top priority for the new Greater Toronto Services Board.

Third, significantly increase the penalties for fleeing from police.

We need a stronger deterrent against leading police on car chases — an automatic five-year jail term would be a good start.

CHANGES MUST BE MADE

One thing is clear, the status quo is not an option.

Not when, as the study points out, there were 10,421 police chases in Ontario between 1991 and 1997, resulting in thousands of injuries to police, criminals and innocent bystanders.

There were also 33 deaths, including six innocent people and one police officer.

That price is way too high, especially since most chases involve young punks under the age of 25 who are either driving stolen cars or are wanted for relatively minor crimes.

Only 3 per cent of the chases involved serious criminals.

Since recovering a stolen car obviously isn't worth risking an innocent life, as Sunday's chase has done with Sarah Bowman, we must find a better way to help police apprehend fleeing criminals.

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