

# Stouffville Tribune

A Metroland community newspaper  
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## EDITORIAL

### Time must fit crime regardless of age

The new Youth Justice Criminal Act will be introduced today in the House of Commons by Justice Minister Anne McLellan.

Criticism of the existing Young Offenders Act, deemed too lax and too toothless to provide any sort of deterrent for underage hoods, has been heard in communities from coast to coast — and rightfully so. Canadians have grown weary of reading about 13-year-olds beating up grandmothers for their purses and walking away with a slap on the wrist.

They're mortified by the thought that a 15-year-old could, conceivably, pay for a murder with just three years of his or her life.

They're horrified that young criminals thumb their noses at the system, confident in the knowledge that the time, in most cases, won't fit the crime.

So Canadians, in general, will likely welcome tougher legislation that could make young offenders appear in adult court for crimes such as murder, attempted murder, manslaughter or aggravated sexual assault, as McLellan's new act states.

They will likely be receptive to legislation that means repeat offenders who commit violent crimes will appear in adult court and face adult penalties.

And longer jail terms for violent offenders and stricter supervision on their release from prison will likely be cheered.

But let's turn down the applause for McLellan's tough new law for a moment (even though we welcome legislation that would be an effective, meaningful deterrent to youth crime) and take a closer look at what this all means.

In McLellan's new legislation, there are some arbitrary selections about what is a terrible enough crime that it deserves serious adult punishment, or what can be viewed as minor and appropriate for much the same punishments as currently exist.

What happens to a young offender who, say, uses a weapon in a robbery — a baseball bat, a knife or a gun? Tried as a young offender? Under the new law, most likely. The courts, of course, can argue that such an offender should be tried as an adult, but the courts have that avenue of appeal now.

A factor that may go unnoticed in all the hoopla, once the government makes its announcement today, is that all the criminals charged with the "serious" crimes under the new act can apply to be tried as juveniles.

Some critics, such as Ontario Attorney General Charles Harnick, conclude that young offenders will continue to be treated as they are now.

The tough portion of the act, we believe, is simply politics. The federal Liberals know Canadians want to hear tough talk when it comes to young offenders, because they perceive youth crime is on the rise.

McLellan is giving them what they want to hear.

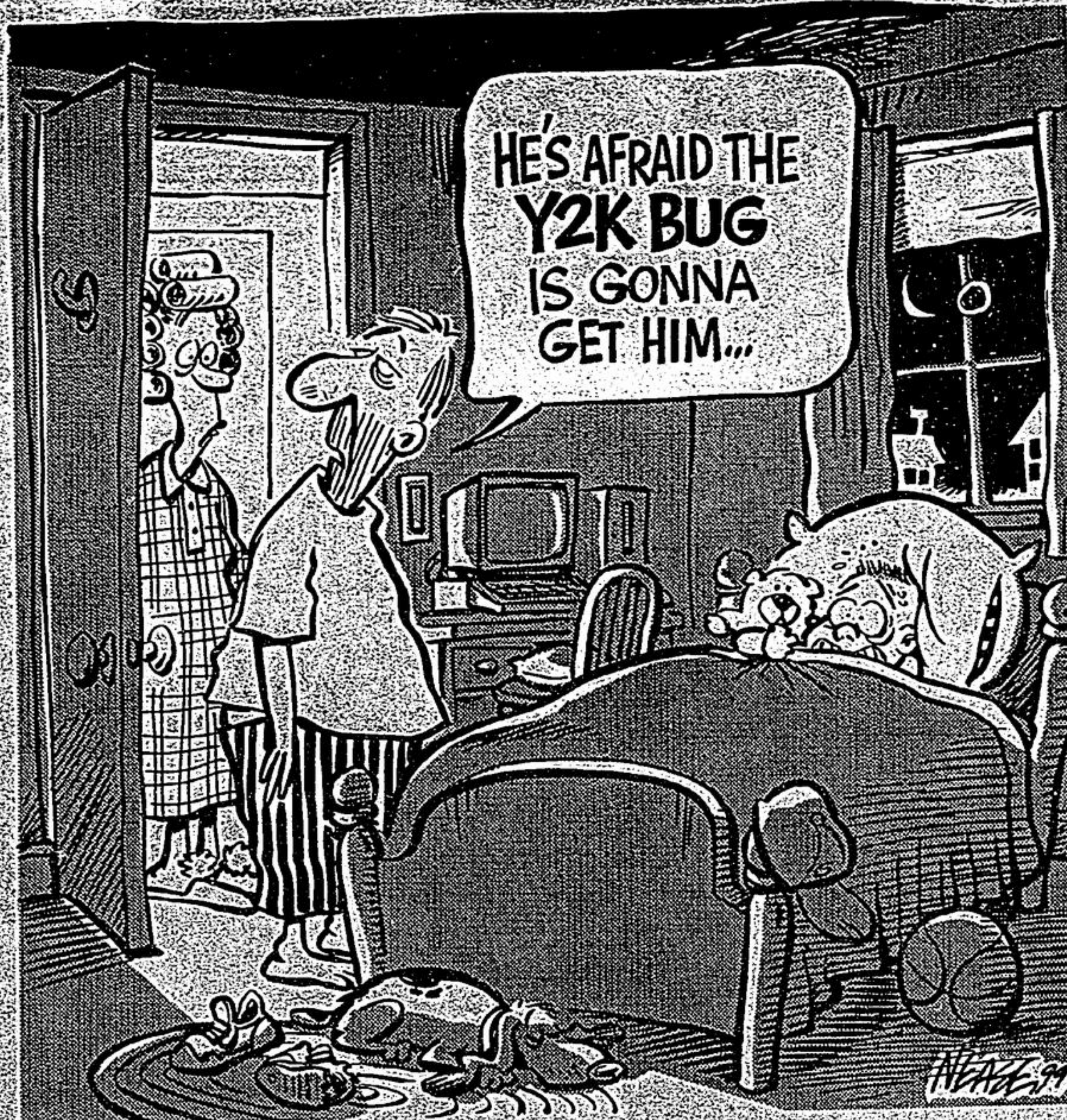
One positive light in the proposed legislation is that police officers will have a little more leeway in dealing with young offenders. They could, for instance, send a youth who has committed petty theft or a drug offence into a rehabilitation program and community service, rather than into detention.

That might serve a far greater purpose to society, as young offenders who truly stand a good chance of effective rehabilitation catch a break from understanding officers of the court right from the start.

In the final analysis, Canadians deserve legislation that deals effectively with serious criminals, regardless of their age, offers rehabilitation and support to those who are willing and able to make a contribution to society and protects those who cannot protect themselves.

Is that so much to ask?

# OPINION



## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Pool a needed investment

I believe a year-round swimming pool is a necessity for this town. It is as much a necessity as the roads, sewers, ice rinks and ball diamonds. It is so necessary the cost of its construction and operation is a very correct use of the town's funds.

When I came to live here 10 years ago it was obvious the only recreational activities the town financially supported were ice rinks and ball diamonds. If you were not interested in team sports, you had to find your recreation outside the town.

I cannot think of one of our adjacent municipalities where such a situation still exists. All have recognized the need to supply as broad a range of recreational activities as possible.

A swimming pool is the one facility that allows every user to participate. For those with a competitive inclination, races and other tests of excellence can be arranged. For those not so inclined, a leisurely swim can be managed.

I have seen senior citizens, babies, teenagers, adults, children, the handicapped and the able-bodied all sharing a pool in harmony. This town is moving from its rural/farming roots and rapidly becoming a dormitory suburb for Toronto. If we do nothing, if we provide no focus for the town, if we do not give it a distinct identity, then it will be absorbed into the continuing urban sprawl and simply become a place name and nothing more.

The proposed development provides jobs. They range from administration to janitorial. They include life

guards, teachers, supervisors, maintenance people and plant engineers, to name a few.

A point of meeting for teenagers, senior citizens, young mothers and all others will exist once this project comes to completion. Adults could give directions to the teen who complains there's nothing to do in "Slowville".

The first study of a pool for Stouffville was conducted in 1973. Since then this subject has been studied to death. The public's opinion has been assessed by means of direct questions, telephone polls, newspaper polls and questions, public meetings, private meetings and even by stopping people on the street at a festivals and having them fill out forms.

It is totally erroneous to claim that this subject has not been studied or that the public's opinion has not been called for.

The final question is, can we afford it? I say we can. We have the money in the bank for the construction. We can build it without borrowing. The operating costs, I also believe, are affordable.

Every pool in the immediate area has an operating deficit of between \$50,000 and \$200,000. I found this out by asking them. Even if this whole amount translated into a tax increase, it comes to less than \$10 for every person. As the town's population increases, the demand on facilities will also increase and thus the operating deficit will fall.

The swimming pool is not only a necessity, but a very affordable investment in the town.

**CHRIS LARKIN**  
STOUFFVILLE



Doug Devine

### Taxpayer rip-off not registering with politicians

Last week's monthly meeting of the GTA mayors drove home a few head-bashing realities for York Region residents:

- York chairperson Bill Fisch doesn't have a clue what he's doing
- Markham Mayor Don Cousens has a clue, but seems to have his hands tied by his Tory blue loyalties.
- The rest of York's mayors are way too busy trying to protect their local turf to waste time or effort on far more important regional issues.

How else can these clowns explain their response to the news that, despite being forced to send \$93 million a year in social funding to Toronto (about \$400 for the average York homeowner), the region is responsible for almost none of the people requiring those services.

A Toronto staff report revealed all four suburban regions are responsible for just 4.6 per cent of Toronto's homeless, compared to 69 per cent from Toronto, 8.5 per cent from other provinces and 10.6 per cent from other countries.

Faced with such damning facts, York's leaderless leader, Bill Fisch, finally woke up to the fact his constituents are being royally ripped off.

"It is very clear we're paying far more than we ought to. We know we have to pay something, but it's larger than it ought to be," he meekly told the other mayors.

"I'd like to see more stats, if Toronto has them."

Excuse me! If Toronto has them? Tell me, Bill, what could possibly be more important for York Region's own staff to be doing right now than gathering the facts needed to fight a \$93-million boondoggle?

Cousens, at least, displayed a basic understanding of how social programs should work when he argued we all have to accept responsibility.

Unfortunately, he seems to have accepted the new Tory definition of the word "all", meaning just the suckers foolish enough to keep living in the GTA.

Once again, we suburban residents can be thankful for Mississauga Mayor Hazel McCallion, who correctly argued housing the homeless should be the responsibility of provincial and federal governments, not municipalities.

Maybe York Region taxpayers should fire Fisch and send his \$88,000 salary to McCallion.

She's doing a lot more to earn it than he is.

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