

Stouffville Tribune

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EDITORIAL

Chambers lead way on amalgamation issue

Leave it to York Region's business leaders to pare the seemingly insurmountable amalgamation issue down to manageable size.

Chamber of commerce directors from across York Region met Friday to tackle the controversial topic, frustrated by the politicians' apparent inability to make headway.

Congratulations to the business community for identifying the urgent need to streamline governance in York Region — they're actually challenging the region to come up with a solution in time for the next municipal election in 2000 — and for pointing out one of the most important steps the region must take — start talking about money.

The time frame may not be realistic, a disheartening reality.

PROVINCE TURNS UP HEAT

Now that the province has turned up the heat, the politicians are starting to visibly respond to entreaties to get amalgamation discussions started.

While the region should have been able to meet a 2000 municipal election deadline, parochial interests have delayed the process to the point where it's next to impossible to achieve a resolution in a year.

There is no reason, however, why within three years York Region should not have its new look and a new mandate for the future — well within the five-year warning the Municipal Affairs minister issued to York's political leaders.

The chambers are demanding the region undertake a financial analysis of various amalgamation models, perhaps contracting consultant KPMG, the firm that evaluated amalgamation savings in Ottawa-Carleton.

In that case, the consultant said, savings of \$50 million to \$80 million annually could be realized if the 10 municipalities and region in Ottawa-Carleton were merged into one.

If the seven urban centres were amalgamated, the savings would run from \$43.9 million to \$72.6 million annually.

A three-city system would save \$8.5 million to \$15.2 million a year.

HIRE ONE CONSULTANT

It makes sense to hire one consultant, rather than have the nine municipalities and the region undertake individual studies of any kind on amalgamation, whether the study looks at finances, at practical applications of managing services, at elected representation or at preservation of communities.

York's chambers haven't yet reached a region-wide consensus on what a new community, or communities should look like.

There are shared concerns about shifting tax bases, about meeting the needs of residents with reduced resources.

They've asked their members to offer their views on a variety of options through a survey.

Newmarket chamber general manager Terry Carter said the chamber leaders believe they, unlike political leaders, can reach a consensus in the best interest of the communities involved.

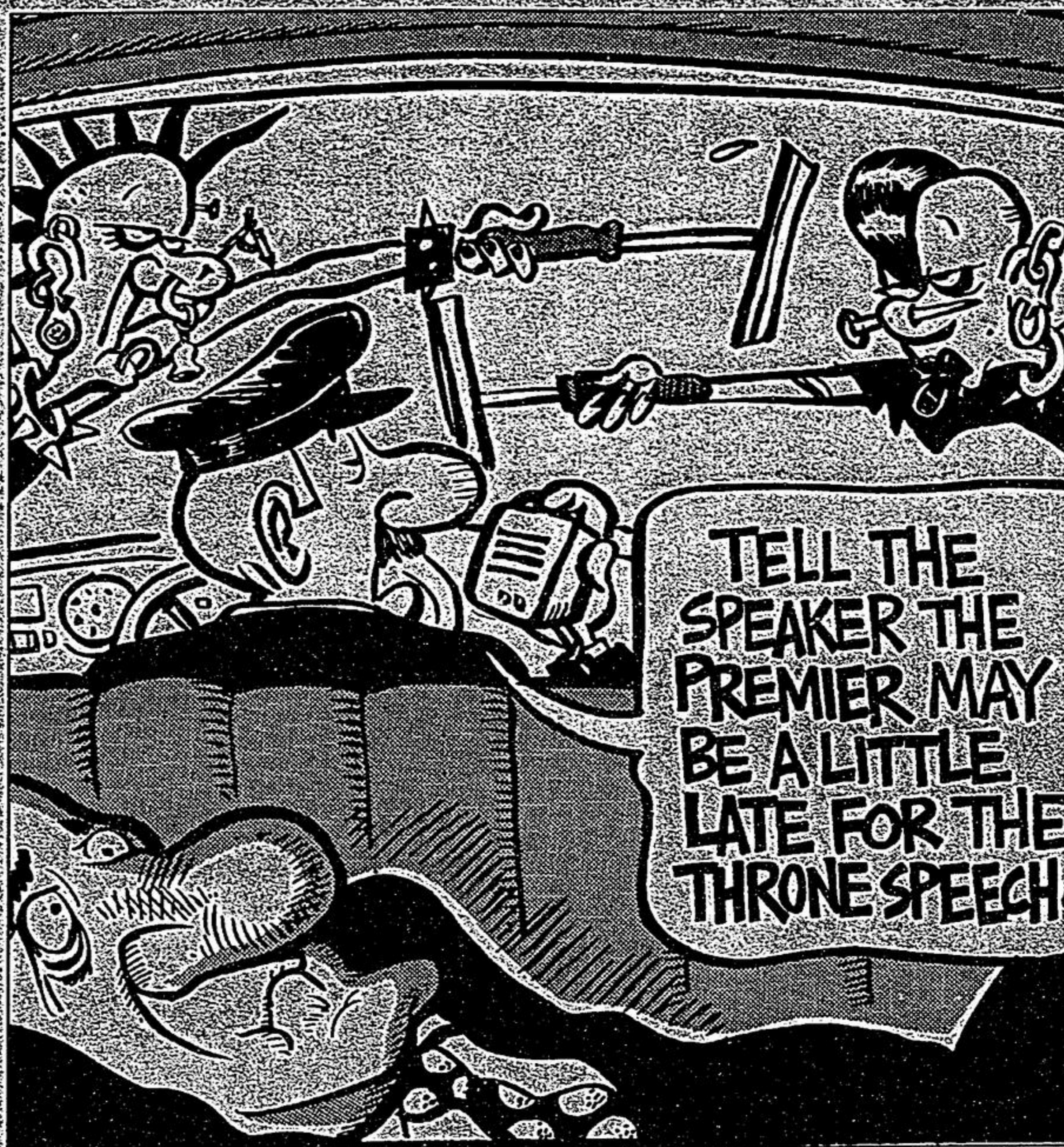
AMALGAMATION IS INEVITABLE

In fact, we share the realistic opinion of York's chambers when it comes to the issue.

Richmond Hill chamber director Barb Scollick says whether or not the business communities favour amalgamation at all is, at best, a moot point.

"It's going to come," she said.
"Do we want to shape our own destiny or have it imposed? End of argument."

OPINION



Dave Teetzel

Police, prostitutes on same side of law

Talk about strange bedfellows. The Toronto police union, the civilian agency that investigates police wrongdoing and three HIV-positive prostitutes have all found themselves embroiled in controversies over public access to information.

The union and the Special Investigations Unit were thrown together after the OPP raided the SIU office last week to seize records of its investigation into the fatal shooting of Tony Romagnuolo.

The investigation led to second-degree murder charges against York Regional Police Const. Randy Martin and weapons charges against two other officers.

But the OPP was called in to investigate how Martin was grazed on the nose by a bullet. They're still working on it and to get the information they need, the provincial officers raided their fellow investigators.

The SIU is challenging the search warrant in court and the police association says it will do the same.

There's a principle here that's important enough to get these old enemies together.

A designated witness officer is required by law to co-operate with the SIU, but not with any other investigation. In this case, Durham Const. Nancy George was a witness officer and had to speak to the SIU, but not the OPP.

Thanks to the raid, the OPP might get her statement anyway.

But this uproar is a minor ripple compared to the fury directed at the judge who won't name the HIV-positive hookers.

The Toronto health department asked for the names, arguing anyone with information about AIDS cases is required by law to report it.

While I don't see why the court is keeping the women's identities secret, it's certainly no secret that they were HIV-positive.

If the clients of these agencies had any sense, they would be getting tested. If they don't, a call from public health won't help.

But the health department's biggest problem is that the cops offered them all this information years ago and they ignored it.

Most people would agree that only matters of life and death should override the right to privacy. What's at issue now is whether these issues are life and death, or just giving somebody an easy way out.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

School board should be accountable for its actions

Regarding the busing situation at Parkland Public School.

The York Region District School Board has erred on two counts.

First, it breached the board's written policy on enrolments by accepting new admissions at a time when accommodation is not available at the school. The Grade 4 students who are being bused out to another school created the necessary accommodation for the new students.

Second, the board is not supposed to relocate students without prior consultation with the parents.

In the Parkland case, consultation was done after the decision was made. The board is reluctant to fix the problem because it is more concerned about losing face. Meanwhile, students continue to miss classes and parents' rights continue to be violated.

Parents have been issued threats for trespassing and disruption offences. Students have been threatened with being struck off the school register. Police have been called in on several occasions and security officers are working at the school.

The chief spokesperson for the parents, Desmond Ali, was taken away by police in handcuffs in the presence of shocked and hysterical eight-and-nine-year-old students.

Initially, when mediation to this dispute was offered, the board insisted that a mediator's recommendation be binding on the parents but not on the board.

One has to wonder why, when mediation subsequently took place, the board did not extend the mediator's engagement until such time as a solution was reached.

The Ministry of Education would not get involved; it claimed it's a local board matter.

I wonder why we pay three levels of taxes in this country. Are we to conclude that the school board, a public institution, has unlimited powers and is not accountable for its actions? If this is the case, we should all be concerned about our democratic process.

V. RAGUNATHAN
MARKHAM

Smoking committee protects health of others

Re: *Smoke-free committee, should educate, not dictate*, Mounir Sahyoun, Letters, Oct. 14.

The tobacco industry tells you each time you open a pack of cigarettes how harmful they are. The industry has gone so far as to put a site on the internet informing people of the dangers of cigarette smoke. What more do you want?

The health freak bureaucrats as you call them are trying to save the lives of non-smokers since second hand smoke has been proven to be more lethal than smoking. I suppose you think the gun law or seatbelt laws are also an infringement of rights. Someone has to make a stand for the safety of others.

G. LIGHT
MARKHAM

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