

Stouffville Tribune

A Metroland community newspaper
9 Heritage Rd., Markham, Ont., L3P 1M3

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EDITORIAL

Province's half-hearted reform of health care is disappointing

Mike Harris was elected for his no-nonsense approach and a willingness to take on critical issues as the province's leader.

The Tories told constituents they were not going to let special interest groups run the show any longer — a promise beleaguered, tax-burdened voters were only too happy to hear.

But the Big Blue Machine is sputtering these days as Harris and his ministers fail to show leadership in key areas such as the environment, education and health-care reform.

Take, for instance, the Tories' latest move to reform health care.

Health Minister Tony Clement announced last week that, after more than one year of discussions, primary care by doctors would be reformed.

The new Ontario Family Health Network would steer Ontario's doctors from the age-old, fee-for-service method of payment. Family doctors would, instead, be paid salaries and would care for a roster of patients on a 24-hour-a-day, seven-day-a-week basis, assisted, of course, by trained staff.

Health-care experts agree taking on Ontario's doctors union could mean political suicide, but admit reform and "political courage" is all that is needed to improve services for a growing and aging population.

Perhaps Harris is moving slowly with the powerful Ontario Medical Association to avoid alienating another public sector.

Liberal leader Dalton McGuinty says Harris has been, agonizingly slow, to reform the public health-care system. And while we would question whether McGuinty would have the fortitude to forge ahead, we know Harris has displayed that type of strength.

That's why it's disappointing to see Clement allowing doctors to call the shots under the proposed reform — allowing physicians to bill OHIP for any clients they see on top of their regular patient roster. He is letting the OMA choose who will sit on the new health network board, thereby acting as skeptical watchdog to the province's every move.

While a fine balance is needed to attract well-trained doctors and to offer Ontarians quality care, Harris must fine-tune his plans and forge ahead.

LETTERS POLICY

Stouffville Tribune welcomes your letters. All submissions must be less than 400 words and must include a daytime telephone number, name and address. The newspaper reserves the right to publish or not publish and to edit for clarity and space.

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OPINION

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Dave Teetzel

Some municipalities are leeching off conservation efforts

You can't blame York Region for blinking at a \$23-million tab, no matter how worthy the cause.

Actually, the Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority and Toronto Region Conservation Authority propose to spend almost \$90 million over 10 years on a comprehensive watershed management strategy, a plan to protect and enhance rivers and lakes, woods and wetlands.

The conservation groups are asking all member municipalities for funding and \$23 million for the next decade is York Region's share.

And in fairness, \$6 million is for work on the region's own greenlands strategy and another \$4.75 million is for the region's report card process.

But it's galling some of our neighbours aren't paying their fair share.

Membership in the Lake Simcoe conservation authority is voluntary and the municipalities on the north shore, including Barrie and Orillia, don't belong.

Three years ago, Barrie's previous mayor argued the city couldn't afford to join the Simcoe group because it's already a member of the Nottawasaga conservation authority.

That was a silly argument then and it's a silly argument now. Richmond Hill belongs to both the Toronto authority and Lake Simcoe, even though only a small sliver of its territory is in the Simcoe watershed.

Whitchurch-Stouffville also belongs to both conservation authorities and if Whitchurch-Stouffville can afford the bill, Barrie certainly can.

Meanwhile, York Region's contribution is high because it's based on assessment. By that standard, we're rich.

If you want to be really parochial about it, most of that assessment is in the area controlled by the Toronto authority, yet we're providing a disproportionate subsidy to the Simcoe region.

In short, homeowners and businesses in Woodbridge and Markham are paying to improve Barrie and Orillia's waterfronts.

In no way am I suggesting York Region refuse to support a conservation strategy outside its borders.

It's just a matter of getting politicians to work in as close harmony as the ecosystem does.

That's why I agree with regional chairperson Bill Fisch that municipalities should be required to belong to any conservation authority affecting lands within their boundaries.

York Region is leading the way, both by initiating strategies to protect green-space and watercourses and by participating in the broader watershed strategy.

But it's time for our neighbours to get on board.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Politicians should not permit off-leash areas in town parks

Re: Dogs could get off leash, *Economist & Sun*, March 22

Good grief. Here we go again with dogs off the leash Markham parks. Should the town lead residents into the fray?

Perhaps other York Region municipalities know something we do not, since none of them has an off-leash policy for their parks.

Is this "dog club" paying a lobbyist or activist to sway council into its way of thinking?

Are the leaders those people who were pictured in the newspaper back in the Dec. 28 issue letting their dogs run off-leash to the detriment of skiers and children tobogganing in Milne Park?

Where was the bylaw officer? Why can he not charge these people?

Just because one dog owner told council "hundreds and hundreds of people are doing it illegally," does this make it just?

Councillor George McKelvey's statement that the town should provide a solution that is compatible with the neighborhood is hog-wash.

Let these dog club people go up to one of the York Regional forests and let their dogs run there, where people are not out strolling and enjoying the beautiful Milne Park.

CHRIS WILSON
Markham

Combine a 407 bus lane and subway extension to ease woes

So our new regional transit manager, Don Gordon, believes we need a better balance between roads and transit. I couldn't agree with him more.

However, to obtain this balance, he is proposing the usual things that transit dreamers fantasize about, bus-only lanes and all the other fuzzy ideas that inhibit rather than promote transit use.

The reality is the current transit systems in the Greater Toronto Area just don't cut it. While Don Gordon's ideas are filled with good intentions, they will not attract passengers when they offer long waits at bus stops and buses with fewer seats and crammed with riders.

The region, in co-operation with Durham, Peel, Halton and the province, should be looking at building bus lanes through the Hwy. 407 corridor linking the Lakeshore GO in Oshawa and the Lakeshore GO in Oakville with a link to the airport. In addition, the University and Yonge Street subways should be extended to meet the bus lane corridor, making a total loop system.

Now for the real shocker. Let the private sector build and operate the system. You will really have a service that competes with the automobile.

The best part of this proposal is the taxpayer wins. Isn't that what this is all about?

J. McCONAGHY
Richmond Hill

Stouffville Tribune

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Ontario Press Council

Stouffville Tribune, published every Thursday and Saturday, is one of the Metroland Printing, Publishing and Distributing Ltd. group of newspapers, which includes the Ajax/Pickering News Advertiser, Alliston Herald/Courier, Barrie Advance, Barry's Bay This Week, Bolton Enterprise, Brampton Guardian, Burlington Shopping News, Burlington Post, City Parent, Collingwood/Wasaga/Connection, East York Mirror, Erin Advocate/Country Routes, Etobicoke Guardian, Flamborough Post, Georgetown Independent/Acton Free Press, Kingston This Week, Lindsay This Week, Midland/Penetangulshene Mirror, Milton Canadian Champion, Milton Shopping News, Mississauga News, Newmarket-Aurora, Georgina Era-Banner, Northumberland News, North York Mirror, Oakville Beaver, Oakville Shopping News, Orillia Today, Oshawa/Whitby/Clarington/Port Perry This Week, Peterborough This Week, Richmond Hill/Thornhill/Vaughan Liberal, Scarborough Mirror, Stouffville Tribune, Today's Seniors, Uxbridge Tribune and City of York Guardian.

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Canadian Publications Mail Product Sales Agreement #1403419
Subscription rates by mail: 1 year - \$69.55 (Thursdays only)