

Stouffville Tribune

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Publisher: **Ian Proudfoot**
General Manager: **Alvin Brouwer**
Editor in Chief: **Brenda Larson**
Director of Advertising: **Debra Weller**

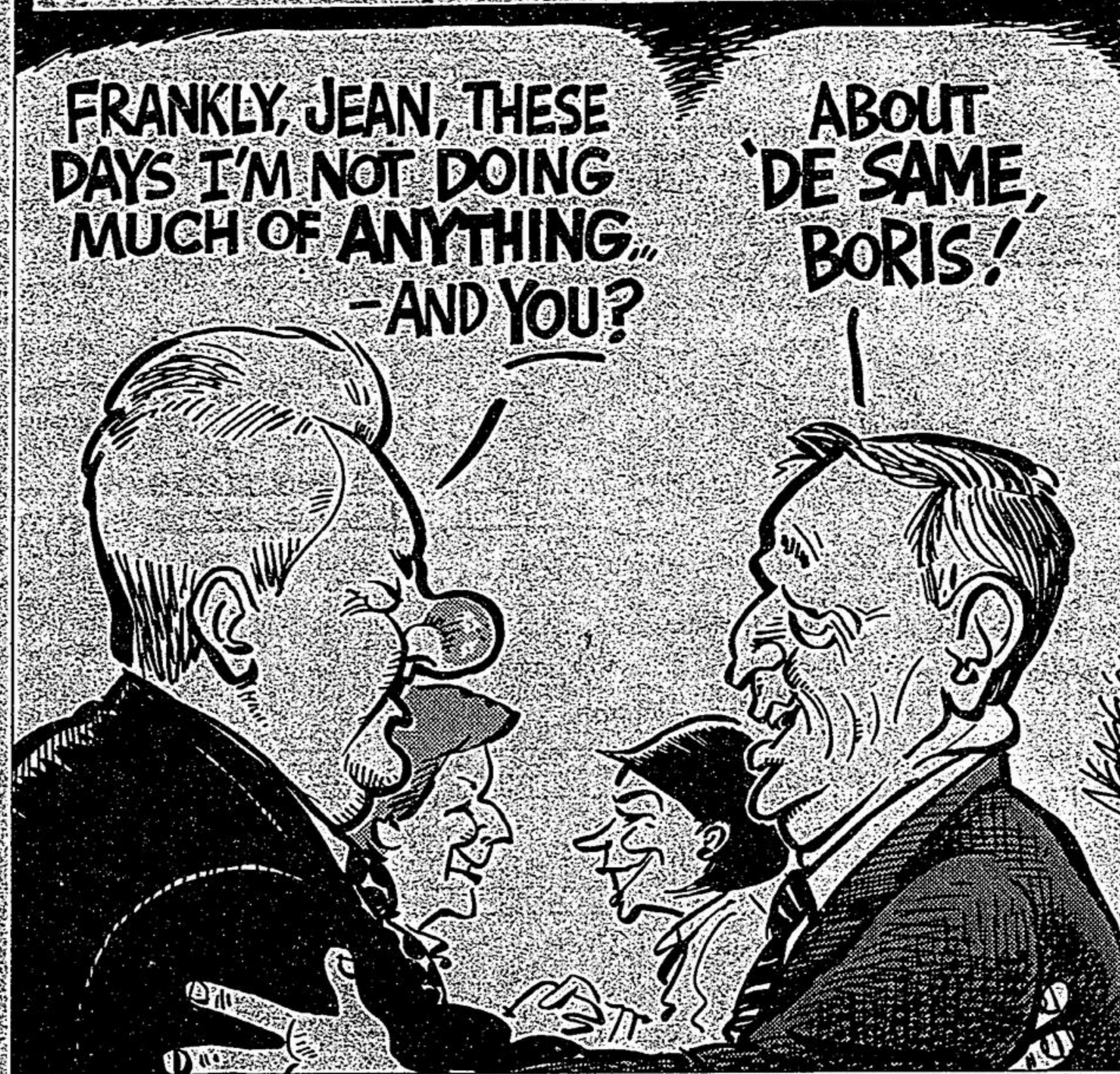
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TELEPHONE
(905) 294-2200 / (416) 798-7624
FAX: (905) 294-1538
EMAIL: newsroom@econsun.com

NEWS ITEM: PM drops in to visit old pal Boris Yeltsin



Dave Teetzel

Off-leash canine parks great way to let the dogs out

I'm an animal person. I own cats but I like dogs just as much. I don't, however, like cats roaming around the neighbourhood wrecking gardens and killing birds. And I don't like dogs running unattended in parks.

A quick search through the past five years of back issues turns up dozens of stories about people and animals being hurt by dogs who weren't on a leash.

Just last month, a Richmond Hill man, who was walking his dog on a leash, was horrified when another dog viciously attacked it at Morgan Boyle Park, causing injuries that cost \$1,800 to treat.

But, as many dog owners will tell you, the average suburban back yard doesn't always provide enough room for a proper game of Frisbee or catch.

Markham has become the first York Region town to catch on to the obvious solution to this problem — designated leash-free zones.

Toronto has at least 21 leash-free parks and many other cities provide similar facilities.

For York Region, a five-acre corner of Milne Park in the McCowan Road and Hwy 7 area is the first experiment.

A group of dog owners has volunteered to supervise the site to ensure animals stay in their section of the park and owners clean up their messes.

If volunteers are willing to come forward in Thornhill, Milliken or Unionville, the town will consider creating leash-free zones there.

The rest of York Region may not be far behind. Whitchurch-Stouffville has been discussing the idea for a while and Vaughan council will hear a proposal next month.

What the politicians have come to realize is people are letting their animals run loose in parks now despite animal control bylaws, some of which carry fines up to \$5,000.

As one of the volunteers pointed out, now there's a place where dogs can run legally and owners have no excuse for letting their pets run amok where they aren't wanted. Bylaw officers can adopt a zero-tolerance policy.

Meanwhile, people who are nervous about dogs — or who have children who aren't nearly nervous enough about dogs — know which areas to avoid.

I think the best part of Markham's scheme is enlisting pet owners themselves to police the operation. They have the highest stake in making it work smoothly and, besides, they speak dog. Seriously, I hope Markham's pilot project is imitated across the region.

I'd consider it a great evening's entertainment to stand around a leash-free area and watch the canine antics. And I certainly wouldn't miss running stories about dog bites in parks.

EDITORIAL

Pleas for efficient health-care system fall on deaf ears

The Tories are determined to entrench a two-tier health-care system.

Evidence of this is the Ministry of Health's decision not to cover ear tests and related speech therapy under the Ontario Hospital Insurance Plan, forcing the province's 400 audiologists to work under doctor supervision.

As Aurora audiologist A. Malandrino said, the decision is "the beginnings of a two-tier health-care system, without a doubt."

Obviously, the move limits the service to only those who can afford to pay. Appalled critics say the decision will affect children, seniors and low-income earners, forcing those who can't afford fees or who have no private insurance to cancel appointments.

This latest move, which is to take effect Aug. 13 and cuts \$50 million from OHIP's \$6.2-billion budget, fuels the argument the Tories are more interested in slashing costs than offering Ontarians a universal health-care system.

This latest cut joins a list of 45 procedures limited or dropped from OHIP since 1994, including infant circumcision, pap smears and eye examinations. Chipping away at OHIP's budget without public input is not only short-sighted but discriminatory.

When the paring of services began seven years ago, it was suggested a committee of doctors, consumers and politicians be formed to review benefit changes or delisting, but it never came to fruition.

Instead, the Health ministry and physicians are making decisions behind closed doors.

Having the Ontario Medical Association, which represents the province's 24,000 physicians, make decisions that will line their pockets, is clearly a conflict of interest.

Not only does it give doctors more power, but forces audiologists to close their practices and find doctors willing to hire them. It's like putting a fox in charge of the hen house with the farmer's blessing.

The health-care system needs reform and there are costs that can be eliminated. But once again, the Tories have chosen the wrong way to initiate change.

Clearly, our pleas for a viable and efficient health-care system in Ontario are falling on deaf ears.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Expand limited GO shuttle service to solve train parking woes

I am delighted to see the recent publicity/discussion on GO Transit.

I have been a regular on the service for almost 10 years and have seen ridership at least double.

This is indeed good news for all, especially drivers. In terms of the current growing pains this service is undergoing in Markham and other areas, I do have a suggestion that may relieve some of the problem for essentially no capital cost and very minor operating cost.

We now have a limited shuttle service to Markham station, which I use regularly. I suggest:

1. This service be expanded immediately by adding additional routes to major subdivisions (the Legacy area would be one example);

2. GO riders be encouraged (rather than discouraged) to use this service by eliminating any additional fare. While not excessive in amount, charging 25 cents is, at the least, a nuisance and a disincentive and thus regressive;

3. I encourage fellow passengers who live anywhere near the shuttle to try it. You'll get home sooner not having to wait to leave the parking lot and you won't have to worry about finding a space in the morning.

It is time for all levels of government, which seem to have bottomless pockets for

spending on road clearing and improvements in a vain attempt to keep up with growth; to show a little courage, vision and responsibility and begin to correct the disgraceful lack of support for public transit.

Until we learn to treat the disease with more than just asphalt bandages, we don't deserve the Olympics or anything else on a world stage.

DAVID ROSE
MARKHAM

Province should buy old gravel pits on Oak Ridges Moraine

The provincial government has good intentions, but sometimes it needs public input.

The greatest risk of pollution on the Oak Ridges Moraine is from gravel pits. As I am writing this letter, pits in Whitchurch-Stouffville could be getting filled with materials I find questionable.

If Queen's Park wants to do good things for the environment, then it should buy these properties and turn them into parks.

That way the landowner is compensated, the water-aquifer properties of the moraine are looked after and the people have green places to call their own.

Please, Mr. Harris, do it.

STEVE PLIAKES
WARD 1 COUNCILLOR
WHITCHURCH-STOUFFVILLE

LETTERS POLICY

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9 Heritage Rd.,
Markham, Ont. L3P 1M3
Email: letters@econsun.com

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Phone: (905) 294-2200
Fax: (905) 294-1538

Classified:
1-800-743-3353

Distribution
(905) 294-8244

distribution@econsun.com