

Stouffville Tribune

A Metroland community newspaper
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EDITORIAL

Private school tax credits should come with price

It would appear the only thing standing in the way of Ontario private schools wishing tax credits is the asking.

Finance Minister Jim Flaherty announced this week virtually no strings would be attached to the plan to phase in tax credits for parents sending children to private schools.

The Tory government made the controversial announcement in last May's budget, attracting virulent opposition from advocates of the public school system.

Flaherty, who is a leadership candidate for Mike Harris' job, said the province's requirements are simply that all private school employees must have a criminal background check and that the same hours of instruction as in the public system be offered.

The announcement was barely cold when Conservative leadership contender Ernie Eves came out swinging on the issue.

While not opposed to providing the tax credits, he suggests basic standards in curriculum, including reading, writing and math, must be met.

Flaherty contends parents must retain the choice to determine what kind of curriculum is suitable for their children.

Which is fine, except when \$300 million — the cost when the credits are fully implemented in 2006 — of public money is being thrown into the pot.

If private schools wish to see the parents of their students receiving tax credits, then, as Eves says, certain curriculum standards should be met — and more.

Private schools, at the minimum, should be required to provide measurable data for student performance standards, student information records, test results and curriculum guidelines.

Private schools should be required to meet the same public and parental accountability standards operating in the public system.

Flaherty knows well the cost of providing credits to private school supporters would balloon if the processes and bureaucracy needed to monitor accountability were put in place.

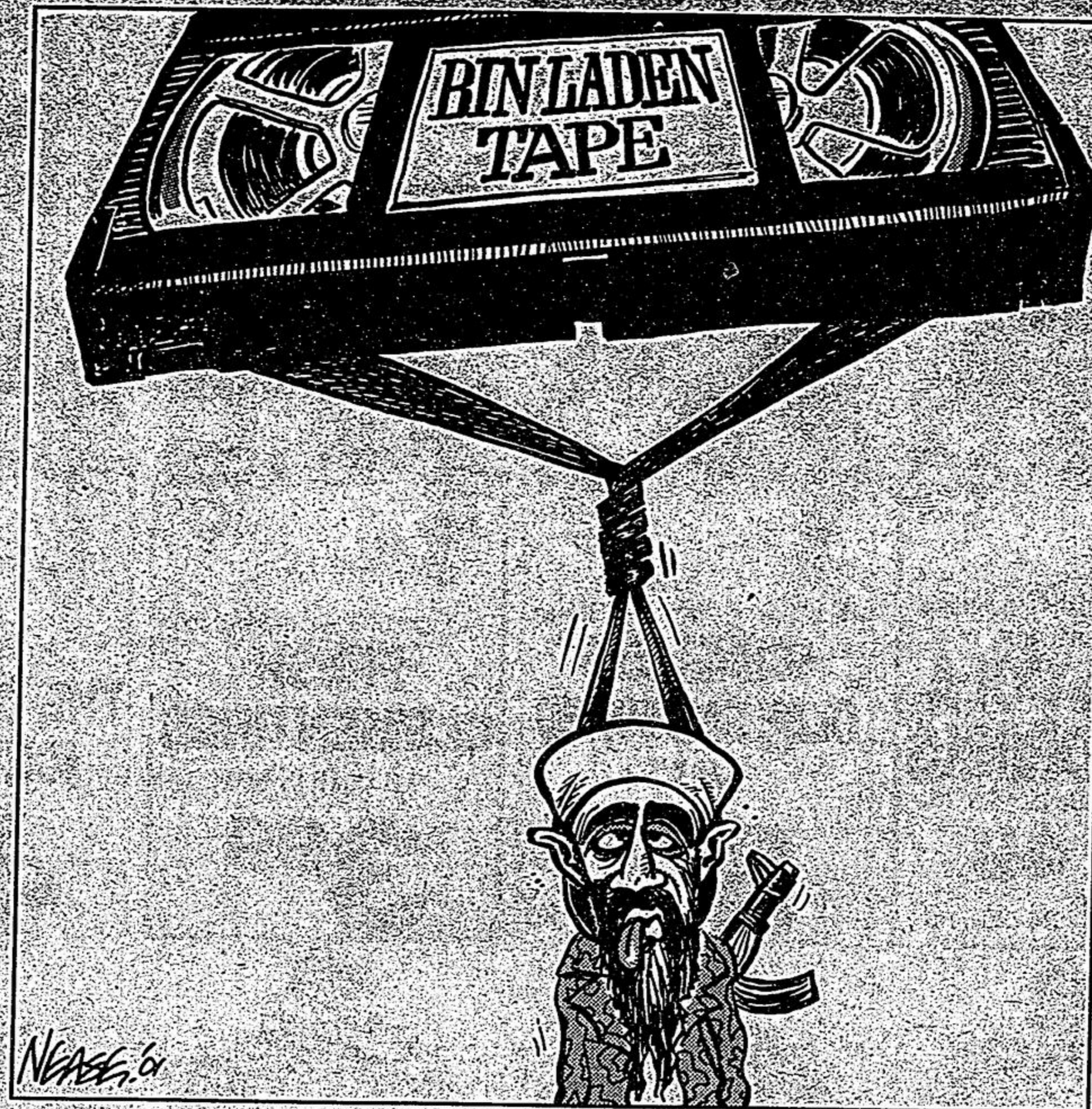
Perhaps the best method of bringing choice to the education system is giving public schools the flexibility to respond to the needs of their constituents.

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.

Write: Letters to the Editor,
9 Heritage Rd.,
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Email: letters@econsun.com

OPINION



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Noise level and safety concerns led to removal of play area

Re: Taking out play area at Markville is a Grinch-like move; letter to the editor; Dec. 18.

Our number one priority at Markville Shopping Centre is looking after the needs of our shoppers and our tenants. And our goal is to provide a safe and exciting shopping venue for everyone who visits.

While I appreciate Ms. St. Louis' concern over the transfer of the former play area space to the Shopper Common Area, the decision was based on several important considerations:

- While responsible people supervised their children in the play area, others, unfortunately, did not. Consequently, there is the potential for injury. Since we pride ourselves in ensuring our shoppers' safety, this situation was a liability requiring redress.

- Since our retailers are also the cornerstone of our business, we are very sensitive to their concerns. The retailers in the vicinity of the former play area repeatedly complained the noise level during peak times made it very difficult for them to operate to the satisfaction of their customers.

- Finally, we opened a state-of-the-art enrichment centre for children in our Embarq lounge. Unlike a play area, Embarq Kids is a learning centre supervised by certified ECE staff.

Since other regional centres do not offer free play areas (children are supervised in an

enclosed area for a minimal fee), we feel, given the calibre of Embarq Kids, our \$10 daily pass for two hours is an excellent value and compensates for the play area closure.

KEVIN GRAY
GENERAL MANAGER
MARKVILLE SHOPPING CENTRE

Mindless youth vandalism ruining Christmas for residents

We have lived quietly and comfortably on a pleasant street for 12 years. But, since Dec. 1 we have been the recipients of mindless youthful vandalism with our Christmas lights.

Many of the bulbs decorating the front of the garage were removed recently. Not to be deterred by the vandals, we replaced them. A few days later, while we were at home in the afternoon, many of those new bulbs were removed. By nightfall, most of them were gone.

We know we are not the only homeowners to be vandalized. Others have had spotlights smashed or kicked down and even the icicle trim torn off eavestroughs.

At a time when we do have youth to be proud of, when so many are conscientiously contributing to society and working hard at their studies, it is disappointing to be recipients of such immature thoughtlessness.

B. AND H. STEWART
MARKHAM



David Teetzel

Vaughan's latest frill only serves to annoy its neighbours

It's no wonder Greater Toronto politicians can sometimes be heard muttering less-than-kind remarks about Vaughan.

The city proudly waves its tax rates — the lowest in the GTA, according to its own survey — and Cadillac services in the other municipalities' faces.

But a wobbly world economy may bring the city back to earth. This year, taxes went up 3 per cent. Preliminary budget talks suggest a much larger increase is possible for 2002.

Unable to continue subsidizing recreation programs at the city's eight community centres, councillors are talking about a 15-per-cent increase in user fees as soon as the new year.

So what does Vaughan do in this dreary economic climate but trot out the most extravagant frill imaginable?

A high-tech satellite-tracking system that allows you to follow the local snowplows around the city on a website — who'd a thunk it?

Vaughan residents can fire up the PC, log on to www.snow.city.vaughan.on.ca and find out exactly where the nearest snowplow is and where it is going next.

Not on the Internet? No problem, just call (905) 879-SNOW and operators are standing by to update you.

All for a relatively cheap \$60,000. Not that I think this will really do much for residents.

Indeed, the website robs citizens of the satisfaction many derive from calling the city and berating some poor receptionist who can't do a thing about the problem.

The best use for a snowplow tracking system is to time your own shovelling. The website might help you avoid the aggravation of just finishing clearing your driveway only to have the snowplow rumble by and block the end again.

But, in Vaughan, this is irrelevant. In Vaughan, they clear your windrows for you.

Indeed, one of the complaints last winter was the crews weren't coming quickly enough to clear the windrows. This winter, the city is promising to clear your driveway within 20 minutes of the plow going by.

In most York Region towns, you will wait forever for someone to clear the end of your driveway.

So how must Aurora residents — who wait patiently for the snowplow, clear their own windrows and are facing a possible 20-per-cent tax increase — feel about Vaughan's expenditure?

There is some consolation, you weary Georginians and Whitchurch-Stouffvillites. You, too, can log on to Vaughan's snow site and note the high-tech, satellite-tracked snowplows are parked in the works yard, still awaiting a significant snowfall.

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Ontario Press Council

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

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/Action 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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