

Stouffville Tribune

A Metroland community newspaper
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EDITORIAL

Don't criticize boards for following Tory law

York Region's school boards have beaten the province to the punch when it comes to background checks on employees.

Both school boards have had policies governing background checks on new employees in place for three years, as a commitment to the community and their safe schools policies.

Education Minister Janet Ecker announced Monday criminal checks — a 1999 Tory campaign promise to create safer schools for students and teachers — would begin this year.

Not all employees in York Region have undergone checks, but both boards will comply with the new regulation, which means 12,000 school board employees who have not undergone checks will be required to do so.

Employees in York Region who have undergone the check in the past three years have paid for it, as part of an offer of employment. The 12,000 employees who must be checked will not be reimbursed for the cost, which can be up to \$35.

While our school boards are to be congratulated for having the foresight to undertake this safety initiative without provincial arm-twisting, for having the strength to make it a requirement of employment and, thus, not burden taxpayers with an administrative cost, we know the provincial regulation will raise concerns for teachers and parents.

For teachers, the questions may be simple and direct. "Why do I have to submit to a background check? I've been teaching in this board for 15 years and I have an exemplary record."

The answer, too, is simple. The safety of all students cannot be measured against the ethics and integrity of one teacher, one caretaker, one school secretary, one lunch monitor.

Teachers may also argue they should not pay for the check, especially if they have perfect records and impeccable reviews. It's understandable some teachers might find this requirement unfair. But it's not fair to burden taxpayers with an administrative function, as both boards have already determined.

Parents may ask the most difficult question. Why did it take the province so long to ensure safety standards such as these were in place?

It's better to have these policies established firmly, even if they are late, than not having them in place at all.

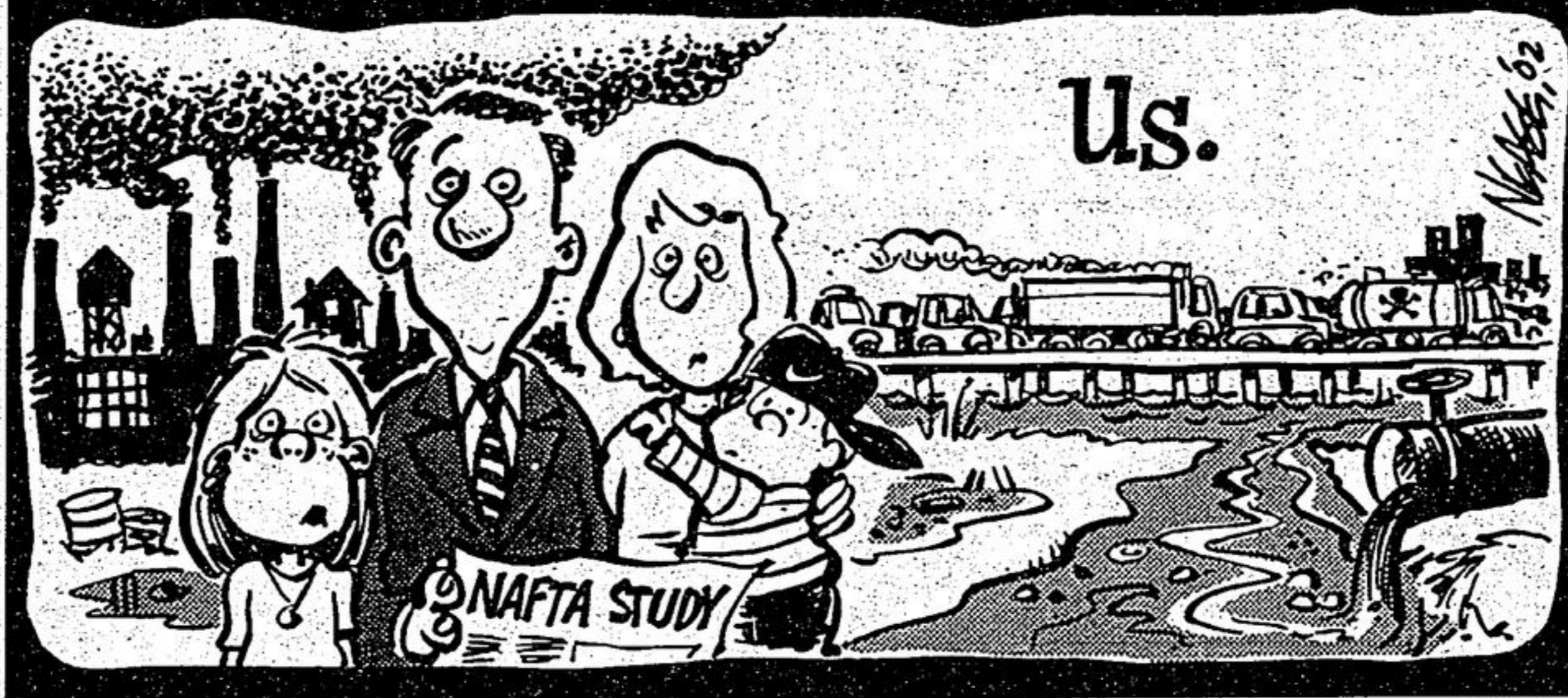
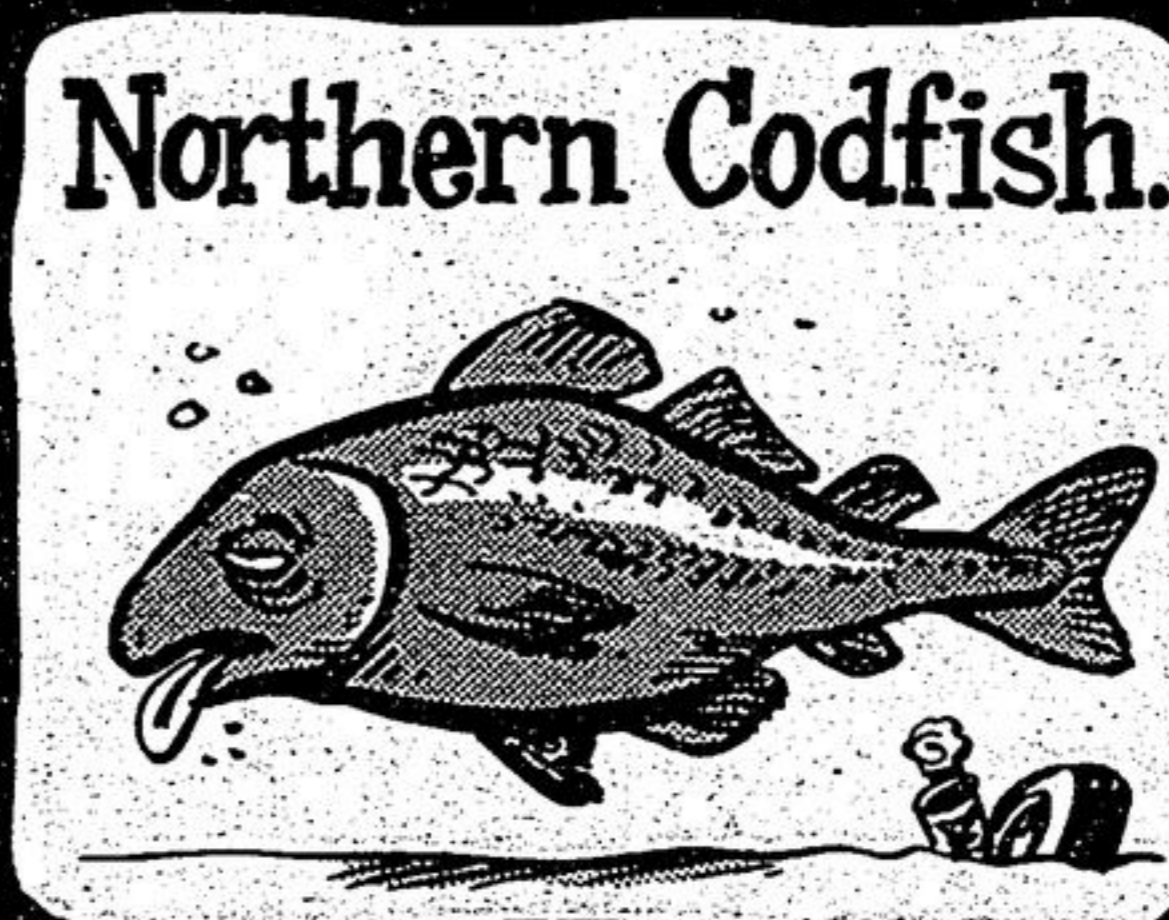
OPINION

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ENVIRONMENTALLY-THREATENED SPECIES:



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Caretakers, teachers helped school recover from vandalism

Re: Vandals ransack rooms at school;
Economist & Sun, Dec. 28

As readers might be aware, Franklin Street Public School in Markham was broken into and vandalized Sunday, Dec. 23.

It is difficult to get over anger and upset when something like this happens. Fortunately, the task was made easier in this case by the courteous, professional response from school board staff, who were able to quickly repair the damage and clean up the mess left by the vandals.

Special thanks to caretakers Mr. Lehman, Mr. Bodmore, Mr. Gardner and Mr. Grove, our secretary Mrs. Wong and the dedicated teachers who took time from their holidays to make sure our offices and classrooms were ready for the first day back at school.

J. SASSOON

PRINCIPAL, FRANKLIN STREET PUBLIC SCHOOL
MARKHAM

Markham Stouffville Hospital staff showed kindness, dedication

So often we dwell on the negative things surrounding us. But this year, through an unfortunate situation, I experienced the true sense of Christmas and the spirit of giving.

On Christmas Day, my 87-year-old mother fell and was taken to Markham Stouffville

Hospital with a fractured hip. Good fortune would have it that Dr. Shirali was the orthopedic surgeon on call Christmas Day.

It could have been an easy decision to sedate mother until the following day and thus not inconvenience his own holiday plans. But instead, he rallied a team of dedicated nurses and an anesthetist to perform surgery.

How fortunate we are to have such kind, caring people working at Markham Stouffville Hospital. We should feel truly blessed to know that this is the type of care offered to all who live in our community.

Although Christmas Day was not spent as planned, the kindness and dedication shown by everyone left me with the true feeling of the meaning of Christmas.

FRED COX
UNIONVILLE

Join our online discussions at yorkregion.com

Your opinion is important to us on our letters to the editor pages and on our website.

We invite you to join the ongoing discussions at yorkregion.com and you're welcome to launch your own discussion there, too.

The site serves readers of the York Region Newspaper Group, which includes The Economist & Sun, Stouffville Tribune, Richmond Hill/Thornhill Liberal, Vaughan Citizen, Newmarket/Aurora Era-Banner, Georgina Advocate and Stouffville Sun.



David Teetzel

Police chopper forced pot-growing operations indoors

Hydroponic marijuana spread like a weed, if you'll pardon the expression, across York Region last year.

York Regional Police raided 82 pot-growing operations last year. They admit there are more out there. This is compared to only 20 raids in 2000.

These incidents aren't isolated to one or two "bad areas". Just look at the most recent incidents.

- Jan. 4: Police stumbled across 400 marijuana plants being grown in a Markham home while investigating the death of a man found in a Richmond Hill parking lot;

- Jan. 2 and 3: More than 400 plants worth \$425,000 were found in two houses in Aurora;

- Nov. 22: The granddaddy of all York Region hydroponic operations is busted — an \$8.5-million lab in a three-storey industrial building in Vaughan;

- Nov. 22: A \$180,000 operation is busted in small, rural Pefferlaw;

- Nov. 6 and 7: Three pot labs are busted in Markham, two on the same street. One of them contained 1,350 plants with an estimated street value of \$1.3 million.

Det. Mike Klimm of the drug squad told our reporter part of the reason for this sudden flood of hydroponic pot was a successful campaign to shut down labs in Vancouver. With the West Coast imports cut off, dealers in the Toronto area started looking for a local supply.

There may be other factors that influenced last year's numbers. It could be cracking down on marijuana became a higher priority with police last year, so there were more investigations and, consequently, more raids.

It may have a lot to do with the police helicopter. In 1999, the Spot the Pot program used the chopper (just a pilot project) to find about \$750,000 in marijuana in farmers' fields across the region.

Once the cops had a full-time helicopter, the growers moved their operations underground.

And, by using hydroponic techniques, they were able to grow a great deal more dope — that 1999 total pales in comparison to several of last year's individual raids.

I think there's another reason York Region's subdivisions are such rich soil for illegal drugs — isolation. You're probably less likely to be noticed in a suburban home than you would be on the back 40 of some far-flung farm.

The usual pattern for most local subdivisions is both parents leave for work early and come home late, the children spend their time at school and daycare and everyone is on the run all weekend.

This is where Neighbourhood Watch comes in. Neighbours must work together to keep these places out because they make the street more dangerous.

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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