

## Stouffville Tribune

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### EDITORIAL

## Residents have to pay for clean water

If you live in the industrialized world, access to fresh, clean drinking water is an essential.

That is why Ontario's Safe Drinking Water Act and its regulations — still being hammered out, critiqued and massaged by municipalities — should be great cause for celebration.

But wait a minute.

While we're raising a toast to Ontario's stringent guidelines to ensure a safe water supply, we mustn't forget who will pay for the massive restructuring of water systems and testing methods. Taxpayers, at all levels.

A 20-page report from the region talks about the ramifications of the Walkerton tragedy, which launched the province's initiatives in dealing with water supply.

York Region could be faced with \$15 million in capital expenses and about \$250,000 a year in staff and lab fees to implement the recommendations of the Walkerton inquiry.

"There are a lot of ways we can get into trouble by not paying attention to every detail (of the province's plans)," the director of York's water and wastewater, Debbie Korolnek said.

That's good news to residents, who have the right to be protected from life-threatening disease and bacteria, regardless of where they live.

And while the region says it is already well under way with protection plans, it admits new policies, overhauling and expanding water testing, delivery and monitoring is going to be a huge and expensive undertaking.

There's the fact 16,000 homes or 53,000 people in York Region drink untested, unregulated tap water every day.

York Region says it doesn't have the resources to test and monitor unprotected water supplies. Richmond Hill Mayor Bill Bell suggested charging residents on private systems for water tests.

That may have to be an option, but while the region enjoys unprecedented growth, it must, along with the province, shoulder some responsibility for polluting water supplies.

With growth comes a demand on services and, while York has been doing an admirable job tackling the many issues that come with a population boom, tightening water system controls must be added to that list.

The province is calling for recertification of all water system operators to ensure they are experienced and knowledgeable in the latest testing and monitoring techniques.

But the region says recertifying its operators will cause a flood of retirements and massive staff shortages.

However, considering many of Walkerton's problems were due to under-trained staff, recertification is a must.

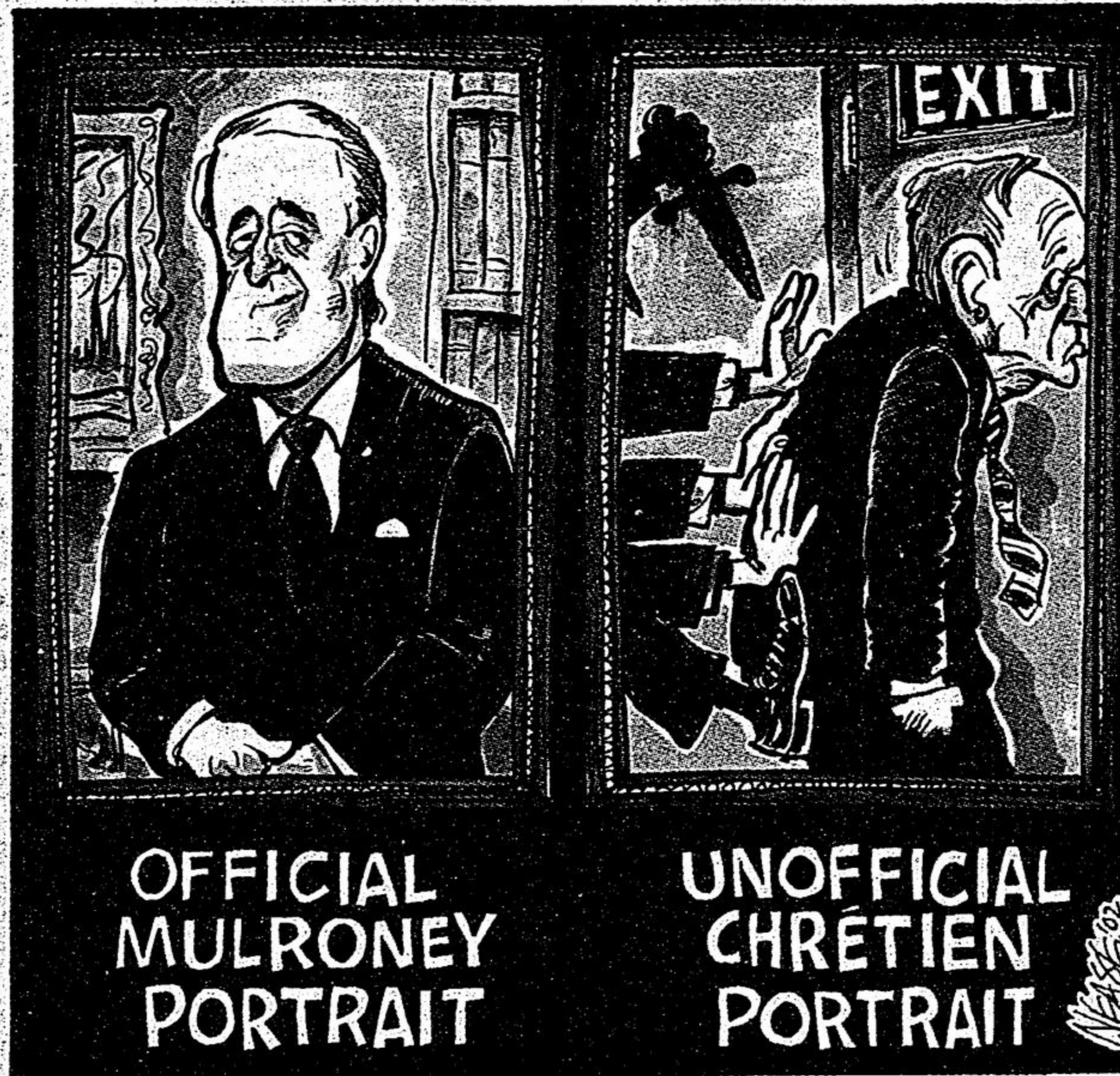
The hands-on, day-to-day staff manning these supplies have huge civil responsibilities and we should expect nothing less of workers paid to look after our most precious resource.

Perhaps a special water levy on new homes might be an option.

# OPINION

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## Health-care crisis not about money, it's about values

What is our crisis in health care? Have Canadians had a fair chance to find out the answer to the question?

With the release of the Romanow report looming, discussion remains frustratingly focused on money.

A Senate committee headed by Michael Kirby recommended a dedicated health tax last month.

According to the author of *What Good Is Health Care? Reflections on the Canadian Experience*, our health-care crisis isn't about cash, it's about values.

In her new book, Dr. Nuala P. Kenny attributes our health-care crisis to poorly articulated values.

She says Canadians haven't clearly defined the meaning of health and health care, the place of health in society and the role of the government.

As long as we define health care as a resource allocation issue the solutions will, obviously, focus on funding.

While Prime Minister Jean Chretien is rejecting a dedicated tax, it's all about the money game for him.

While admitting the system needs "some modernization", he says, "It is the business of the government to decide where money will be allocated ... We'll see what we can do. We want to keep our books balanced."

That kind of thinking simply leads to policies that create winners and losers in a game of allocation, according to Dr. Kenny. "Because of the pervasiveness of technology and the almost unlimited potential benefit from medical science, framing the issue this way leads naturally to options that will increase the money available for these resources through private arrangements."

That's what is happening in Ontario.

The province has shaken hands on a deal with a private company to build a hospital in Brampton.

This week, Ontario Hospital Association president David MacKinnon said "effectively insolvent" hospitals must create partnerships with the private sector to grow.

Have Canadians had a chance to really think about what the goals of health care are? Is it really unlimited health benefits to all citizens? Is it simply about receiving care in a timely manner? Or is it much larger than that?

Is solving our health-care crisis a test of our commitment to community? In our globalized world, has health care become so commercialized that the idea of a real debate is idealistic? Have the values of the market overrun those of a caring community?

Canadians must have an opportunity to debate the answers to these questions.

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

#### Province should let people decide on hydro deregulation

Re: *Deregulation of hydro in Ontario still alive: MPP, Nov. 14.*

MPP Frank Klees and Premier Ernie Eves are in agreement: "Unforeseen market forces caused the crisis in electricity." The very nature of markets is their unpredictability and if you could predict the markets, you would be a billionaire.

This is precisely why electricity was made public and regulated in the first place. The Conservatives decided to continue with deregulation after the collapse at Enron and deregulation failures in Alberta, California, New Zealand and many other places.

As for the Liberals, after leader Dalton McGuinty suddenly backtracked on his support of privatization, who knows what his party's electricity policy is?

The people have seen first hand what a profit-focused electricity market does to their hydro bills. They didn't like it.

Provincial and federal politicians of all stripes hadn't had this many angry phone calls on an issue in decades. The deregulation of hydro in Ontario is now added to a long list of electricity market failures around the world.

Given the facts, it's astonishing that the Conservatives haven't changed their electricity policy one bit. The party remains committed to deregulation and is also trying to fix it.

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

Write: Letters to the Editor, 9 Heritage Rd., Markham, L3P 1M3, e-mail letters@econsun.com

Corporations such as Power Budd, Brascan and British Energy are scrambling to convince people that somehow electricity competition is still good for us.

The one thing pro-privatization politicians and corporations have forgotten is the people. What is the will of the people? They have spoken loudly and all the polls show overwhelmingly that they don't want private power.

A hundred years ago there were six referendums held in Ontario on electricity. All the same arguments, using the same words to promote private, for-profit power were put forward. The people overwhelmingly chose public power.

Hydro was created by referendum and that referendum law was in place until the Conservatives removed it in Bill 26 in 1996.

The choice is clear. Private, for-profit power or "at cost" public power. Let the people decide. Now.

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