

OPINION

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Editorial

Cameras protect police and citizens

It's all about accountability. Accountability for bad drivers, accountability for front-line police officers. And accountability is rarely a bad thing.

OPP officers policing the Greater Toronto Area's 400-series highways now have two more tools at their disposal; a digital camera mounted in their cruisers and a remote microphone to record conversations.

The three-year, \$400,000 pilot project, announced by Community Safety Minister Monte Kwinter Tuesday, is being billed as a way to protect police officers, not target them.

Mr. Kwinter and OPP officers argue the cameras and audiotapes will also save court time because drivers will be less likely to challenge officers if everything has been caught on tape.

The camera never lies — and the audiotape doesn't hurt either.

Under the OPP's system, the digital cameras, which record to a DVD mounted in the trunk, turn on whenever the siren or flashing lights are activated or if the cruiser is involved in a crash. An officer can also turn on the camera manually. At the end of each shift, the DVDs are taken back to the police station, and downloaded in case video evidence is needed.

American police forces and the RCMP have used cameras in their cruisers for years. So what has taken other Canadian police forces, especially those in the GTA, so long to put cameras in their cruisers?

It appears resistance by some of our top cops, such as Toronto Police Chief Julian Fantino and his York Region counterpart Armand La Barge, is partly to blame. Both Chief Fantino and Chief La Barge say placing cameras in cruisers suggests officers can't be trusted.

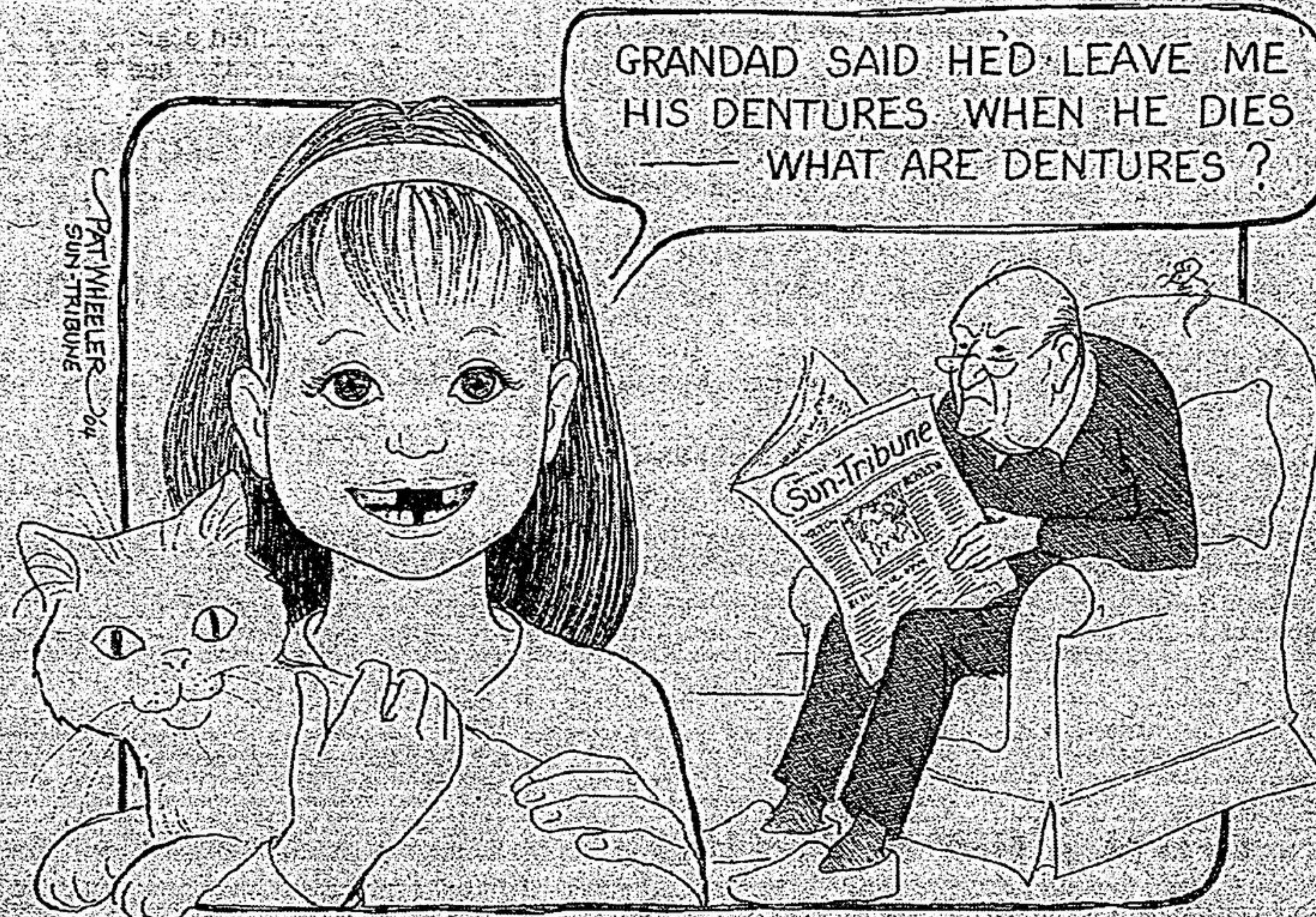
Part of the hesitancy by Chief La Barge and Chief Fantino seems to come from the fact the latest push for these cameras comes from the Human Rights Commission as a way to determine if racial profiling plays a role in policing.

Of course, that is only a small part of the benefit of recording interactions between police and civilians. Cameras in cruisers will help catch crooks, too.

To Chief La Barge's credit, he doesn't appear to be as dead set against the idea as Chief Fantino.

As early as it is, positive reports are coming from front-line officers who have used the cameras for about one week.

And that's the point. It goes both ways. York Regional Police and the citizens they serve deserve no less.



Off The Top

with Jim Mason

'Different Kid' tells it like it is for classmates

They say public speaking is one of life's toughest chores. Ten-year-old Emily Holt has no problem with it.

She could have been any other Grade 5 kid standing in front of fellow students at Stouffville's Summitview Public School, in her pink Gap hoodie, blue jeans and hair band.

But she's "The Different Kid" as the title of her poem reads.

"I'm Emily. I'm 10. I have Albinism and I can't have anything to get rid of it — and I'm me," she led off to a pair of classes in the Main Street school's lunch room Tuesday morning.

She forgot to add "perfect" to her description. If an association of albinos or the sight-impaired is looking for a youth spokesperson, Emily's the one.

"I'm not sure why and I really don't care but lots of people like to stare."

"My hair is white and so are my lashes. If the light is too bright, I sometimes see flashes."

She's straight up in her poetry, her speech and the answers to her classmates' questions.

"No driving for me; I can't see far enough," she told them.

In short, her eyes didn't form as they should have, making her legally blind with 20/300 vision. They're also super light sensitive, forcing her to wear a visor and sunglasses on bright days. She can't control eye shaking that often hits her.

In school, she uses aids including large-print computers and calculators and large-print books. Stephanie Sommer, a vision resource teacher with the York Region District School Board, makes regular visits.

Stephanie isn't sight impaired, but brought along Angus, a German shepherd seeing-eye dog, to the demonstration. She also had goggles to simulate vision impairment, and a brail edition of Monopoly for the Grade 5s to try.

"I have no pigment (in my skin); you guys all have pigment," Emily said.

She's somewhat used to the staring. "Some kids tease me, but I just walk away," she told me after her presentation received a loud ovation.

At school she's a B student. Away from it she takes dance classes and delivers the Stouffville Sun-Tribune, like a lot of other 10-year-old Stouffvillites.

In reality, she's so much more.

"I'm a special gift from God, a little different from the rest. But that's what makes ME one of the best."

Jim Mason is editor of the Sun-Tribune.

Letters to the Editor

Need for local food bank lives on

It is with grateful hearts the executive of the Whitchurch-Stouffville Food Bank says thank you to the community for the wonderful way you continue to provide for our needs. The donations of food and gifts of money enable us to generously care for those who seek help.

The need for food banks still exists in our community and we thank the volunteers who, for the past 14 years, have given of their time.

As well as the usual canned goods of soups, vegetables, fruit and meats, we have a need for powdered milk and Cheeze Whiz. Donations of food can be placed in the food barrels in the A & P, No Frills, Sobeys and Giant Tiger stores.

Financial donations may be made payable to: Whitchurch-Stouffville Food Bank, P.O. Box 343, Stouffville, Ont. L4A 7Z6. For further information, call 905-640-4704 or 905-640-3222.

ESTHER POWELL
WHITCHURCH-STOUFFVILLE FOOD BANK

Liberals don't deserve our support

Re: Emmerson deserves support, Jim Thomas column, Feb. 5

I was astonished to read Mr. Thomas will now get a Liberal membership card. In light of the Auditor General's scathing report on an incredibly corrupt, inept, contemptuous and arrogant Liberal administration at the federal level, what possibly could motivate someone to come out and publicly support these politicians? Bad timing, Jim?

His comments that Wayne Emmerson deserves

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his support are extremely naive. Jim, once Mr. Emmerson gets elected — don't bet the back 40 on that just yet — he will be the nice, gentlemanly member for Markham-Oak Ridges sitting quietly in the back row of Liberals, nodding away in unswerving blind approval of whatever the leader tells him to do.

Don't believe me? Just look at the record of federal Liberals from Ontario. We have had almost 11 years of Liberals in Ottawa, they ran the place like a kingdom because they had no viable opposition.

Now Mr. Emmerson may be a nice fellow with an honourable civic record, however, the political environment in Ottawa is quite different from that of small-town Stouffville. As we have repeatedly heard, it reeks of corrupted political ethics.

No matter what his good intentions may be, he will surely be swallowed up by the Liberal tactics: get elected; do anything to get re-elected.

Voters in Markham-Oak Ridges will soon have the opportunity to show their appreciation for all our Liberal government has done to us.

Let's hope the voters provide them with the fate they so justly deserve.

TOM RITCHUK
BALLANTRAE

Stouffville Sun-Tribune
A Metroland Community Newspaper

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