

OPINION

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Editorial

Clean up process to attract voters

Elections Canada is thinking ahead when it comes to future voters.

The national agency is borrowing an idea from Ontario, called Kids Voting Canada, that gets high school students interested in election campaigns by giving them a mock vote.

The totals are tracked to show how they would have influenced the real election. The idea is to encourage students to follow elections and vote after they reach the legal voting age of 18.

It's a good way to engage people in the political process. And it's not all Elections Canada is doing. It's also launching a hip ad campaign geared to bringing more Canadians aged 18 to 25 to the polls.

But a slick advertising pitch and a well-meaning civic project, such as Kids Voting Canada, may not be enough to attract young voters.

Voter apathy among young Canadians may be a symptom of a disease eroding politics at all levels — insincere campaigns that, at times, turn nasty.

King City Secondary School student Kristine Tran, a student trustee, said as much as she participated with Kids Voting Canada just before the last provincial election.

Voter turnout — and voter turnout — isn't only a problem at the federal level.

In fact, it gets worse the closer you get to the people.

Municipal elections garner the least voter interest, despite the direct impact municipal politicians can have on their constituents.

Newmarket Mayor Tom Taylor was so distressed at the turnout in his municipality last year — 31 per cent — he established a task force to find out why few voters show up election after election.

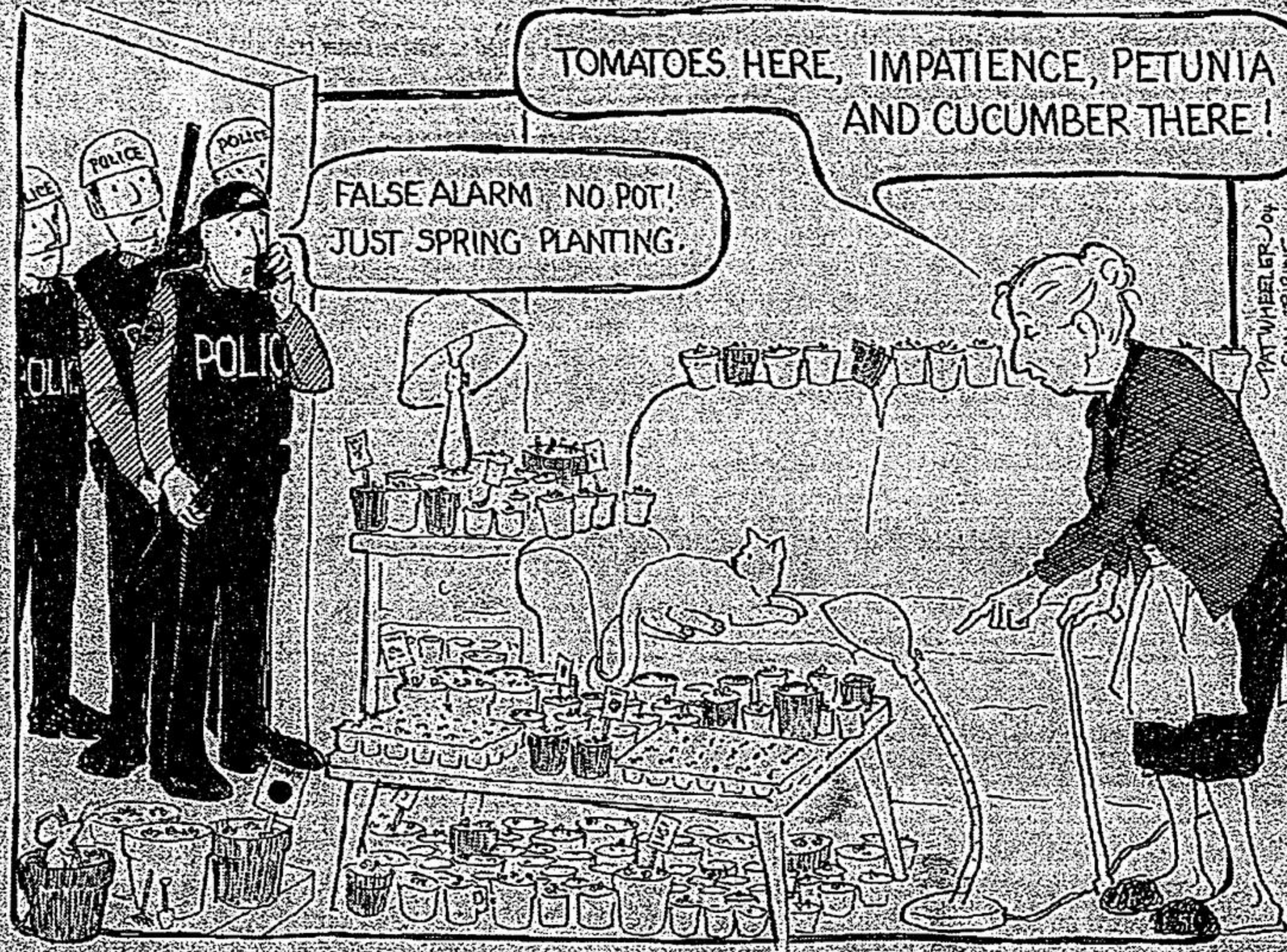
Mr. Taylor should be commended for not simply gloating voters are so happy with their municipal politicians, they don't bother to show up at the polls to vote them out of office.

The truth is likely more troubling. Concepts such as Kids Voting Canada and studies such as the one being conducted in Newmarket can't harm voter turnout. They should be encouraged.

But it wouldn't hurt if politicians acted as though they cared about how many show up at the polls by showing some decorum during campaigns.

Negative advertising, personal attacks on political opponents, broken promises — they all contribute to voter apathy.

It's time Elections Canada and its provincial counterparts played a greater role by policing the conduct of politicians during campaigns.



Letters to the Editor

Spirit junior hockey players great role models, citizens

On behalf of Mrs. Moller's Grade 5 class at Summitview Public School, we want to thank the Stouffville Junior A hockey team, the Stouffville Spirit, specifically players Jake Van Allen, Michael Lombardo and Neil Conway, for being great role models and town citizens.

We appreciated their visit to our school and our classroom Jan. 21. Thank you for sharing the message to always do your best in school and to remember that school should come first.

We really appreciated the donated items, a signed T-shirt and goalie stick, for our class silent auction. The students in our class earn Mrs. Moller's dollars for demonstrating initiative, co-operation with others and responsibility. We then use our earned dollars to bid on silent auction items.

We can hardly wait to see who has the highest bid to win the autographed goalie stick and the T-shirt.

**KATHRYN ALEXANDROWICH
MIRANDA CLAYTON
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MADELYNN HEIKENS
EMILY HOLT AND
CEILIDH WELCH**
SUMMITVIEW PUBLIC SCHOOL
STOUFFVILLE

The Stouffville Sun-Tribune welcomes your letters. All submissions must be less than 400 words and must include a daytime telephone number, name and address.

The Stouffville Sun-Tribune reserves the right to publish or not publish and to edit for clarity and space. Write: Letters to the Editor, 34 Civic Ave., P.O. Box 154, Stouffville, L4A 7Z5, e-mail jmason@ymg.com

Translate technical information for public, town councillors

This year, Whitchurch-Stouffville council will be reviewing and updating secondary plans for Stouffville, Ballantrae-Musselman's Lake and Gormley.

This involves massive studies of planning and land use issues.

I suggest that the information involved should be translated from technical jargon into common understandable English for the sake of councillors and the public.

How can council prepare itself for this major task?

Should councillors consider setting up a special committee to receive input from the public and to provide information to the public?

This would be in keeping with open government policies.

MARGARET L. MAY
STOUFFVILLE



Off The Top

with Jim Mason

Rookie politicians breath of fresh air

On my list of least appealing jobs, I'd put town council member down there with professional diaper changer and toxic waste shoveller.

Way down there.

Not that there's anything wrong with any of those career choices, kids.

Just not for this guy.

Late-night meetings, later-night nasty phone calls, all the ribbon and cake cuttings you want and never being able to satisfy all of the electorate. All for a few thousand bucks a year. Priceless.

That makes the latest rookie-laden edition of Whitchurch-Stouffville council remarkable.

Articulate, intelligent and open. That's my mini-review of the councillors I've encountered as editor.

Don't mistake this as a personal shot at any of the previous councils, at least the ones I've known here since 1982.

But many of those six packs of politicians, plus mayor, were rife with discontent. Councillors with their own agendas. Politicians who come on like gangbusters with community forums and monthly newsletters then all but disappeared.

Bickering in backrooms and barrooms, let alone the council chambers. Grandstanding citizens groups, often with one item on their agenda and a shelf life shorter than table cream.

All that was missing was a Mel Lastman cameo.

It was often not a pretty picture. Newsworthy, yes. "Good for selling newspapers," as the critics would tell us, but not a productive use of taxpayers' dollars. The 2003-06 edition of council could turn into one of these circuses. But I'm betting against it.

Aside from the bizarre questioning of a nature preserve that somehow became a snake pit, the new council is showing both smarts and teeth.

It turned the town's operating budget back to staff for more paring.

Councillors seem genuinely concerned with informing residents, be it through a revamped town advertising page in this paper or news releases sent to the local media.

Good news, because I can count the number of press releases distributed by the town in the last 20 years on my fingers and toes, without taking my shoes off.

Jim Mason is editor of the Sun-Tribune.

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