

OPINION

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Editorial

Teenagers deserve to vote

What would happen if 16 and 17-year-olds could vote in Canada? What irreparable harm would come to our electoral system? To the integrity of our democracy?

If it were law in the next federal election, would they vote en masse? All one million of them voting for some radical new party, turning Canadian politics on its ear. Voting irresponsibly, voting without conscience.

It's that type of hyperbole that gets tossed around when the subject of lowering the voting age comes up.

Ajax-Pickering Liberal MP Mark Holland has sparked the debate with his private member's bill earlier this month.

When Mr. Holland introduced Bill C-261 in the House of Commons Nov. 4, his reasoning was simple: "To increase the participation of youth in the Canadian electoral system... so they can learn to be active electors while still in school."

It's a good reason. But only one of many.

Most agree paying taxes gives you the right to choose the taxman. Youth under the age of 18, the current voting age, pay plenty in taxes, especially sales tax.

So why shouldn't they get to vote? Youth are also the primary recipients of education, one of Canada's most important tax-funded institutions.

And just like older voters, they have a huge stake in the future of health care, the environment and social security.

So why shouldn't they get a vote? Voter turnout can only be boosted by allowing more voters. And parents who don't vote now may go to the polls when they learn their 16 and 17-year-olds are engaged enough to cast a ballot.

There are other less tangible reasons to lower the voting age. Youth are always being told to act responsibly, to consider the outcome of their actions. Yet society devalues them by taking away their democratic rights.

Voting will validate their worth as contributing members of society. It will boost their confidence.

The naysayers — incredibly there are many youth among them — point to lack of maturity as the main reason for denying the youth vote.

Yet convicts get to vote — enough said.



Letters to the Editor

Stouffville should twin with Northern Ontario community

I would like to acknowledge the generosity of St. Mark's Catholic Church's Women's League of Stouffville and the Stouffville United Church outreach project.

These groups sent school supplies, sports equipment, books and fun items for the children at J.R. Nakogee Elementary School in Attawapiskat, a Cree reserve with a population of 1,500 people on James Bay.

How very thoughtful. The children are enjoying their new sports equipment and having fun with their craft supplies.

Our family members live in Attawapiskat, where both our daughter and her husband, who is from Attawapiskat, are teachers. Our grandchildren attend the school.

The students and teachers are working under difficult conditions as the elementary school is closed due to contamination from broken oil pipes and the secondary school is closed due to water damage.

All the students must now share portables. The elementary students go to school in the morning and the secondary students go in the afternoon. The secondary school may be ready in the spring.

Ontario Lt. Gov. James Bartleman led a book program last spring and collected more than 1.2 million used books to stock school libraries in First Nation communities in Northern Ontario.

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@yrmg.com

He announced his next initiative this fall. He is encouraging schools in southern Ontario to twin with schools in the north. Schools in the south would stock books in the library.

He also would like twinning between municipal governments and First Nation bands. Then, we get to know each other and learn from each other. Check out his website at it.gov.on.ca for more information on the proposal.

It would be fitting if Attawapiskat and Whitchurch-Stouffville twin, both schools and communities. The benefits would enrich both communities.

Let's continue the work started by St. Mark's Catholic Church and Stouffville United Church and connect with our fellow Northern Ontarians.

**LOVANNA SANDERS
STOUFFVILLE**



Off The Top

with Jim Mason

Playing Santa hits home for York Region police officer

Mark Lau knows both sides of the tracks in southeastern York Region. If Markham and Stouffville appear only as backsplits with three-car garages, soccer moms driving imported SUVs and \$200-a-plate charity galas, they aren't.

Mr. Lau is a constable working for the regional police service's community response unit out of 5 District on McCowan Road. That includes work on everything from traffic to drugs at venues from high schools to Santa Claus parades.

"The neat thing about policing is that you see all walks of life, from the very fortunate to the not-so-fortunate," the fourth-year officer said.

So, when the police service was looking for volunteers to work on its 2004 Toys for Tots campaign, Mr. Lau stepped forward.

DONATE AT STORES

The eighth annual campaign kicked off yesterday and runs through Dec. 13.

Residents are encouraged to donate Canadian Tire money or cash at all Canadian Tire stores in the region, including the outlet on Main Street in Stouffville.

The donations are used to buy toys for needy children identified by 22 agencies in the region, including the Salvation Army and local food banks.

New unwrapped toys can also be dropped off at any of the region's five police stations.

"I have a soft spot for kids," said Mr. Lau, a Toronto father himself. "Kids hear other kids talking about all the presents they'll receive and not all of them will get them."

"We're in houses where the family, for whatever reason, can't buy presents. They have other priorities, like having enough money to buy food and clothes."

The toys will be delivered to the needy homes the week before Christmas.

"Just to see the joy in the kids, faces that day will be worth it," said Mr. Lau.

Jim Mason is editor of the Stouffville Sun-Tribune.

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