

# OPINION

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**Sun-Tribune**

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## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Rationale for council raises filled with many holes

Re: Markham councillors give selves raise, Jan. 22.

Your article omits some very important facts.

As a member of the citizens committee, I can speak with some authority, even though I was the only member who disagreed with the method of arriving at the final figure and healthy increases recommended.

Council already approved a 3.5-per-cent increase effective April 1, 2004. Not including the York Region portion of salaries given to the mayor, deputy mayor and regional councillors, in just nine months, salary increases range from 8.9 to 11.7 per cent, while staff received a 3.5-per-cent increase.

Mississauga recently announced a 3-per-cent salary increase for its mayor, councillors and non-union staff.

You might ask how the citizens committee arrived at its recommendation.

First of all, it ignored the raise received in April. Members used an average of councillors' salaries from Richmond Hill, Markham and Vaughan.

The problem with using the average for these municipalities was the cost per taxpayer was already the highest here in my analysis.

Therefore, if you are starting with a high average base, you arrive at a high average salary and, in my opinion, an erroneous conclusion.

Not satisfied with these results, members arbitrarily decided to pay local councillors 60 per cent of the adjusted salaries of regional councillors. Prior to the committee's involvement, the percentage was 57.1.

In effect, committee members arbitrarily gave councillors another increase with no justification, in fact the third increase in nine months. Salaries of the mayor, at 145 per cent, and deputy mayor, at 106 per cent, were based on this premise. It's wrong, in my opinion.

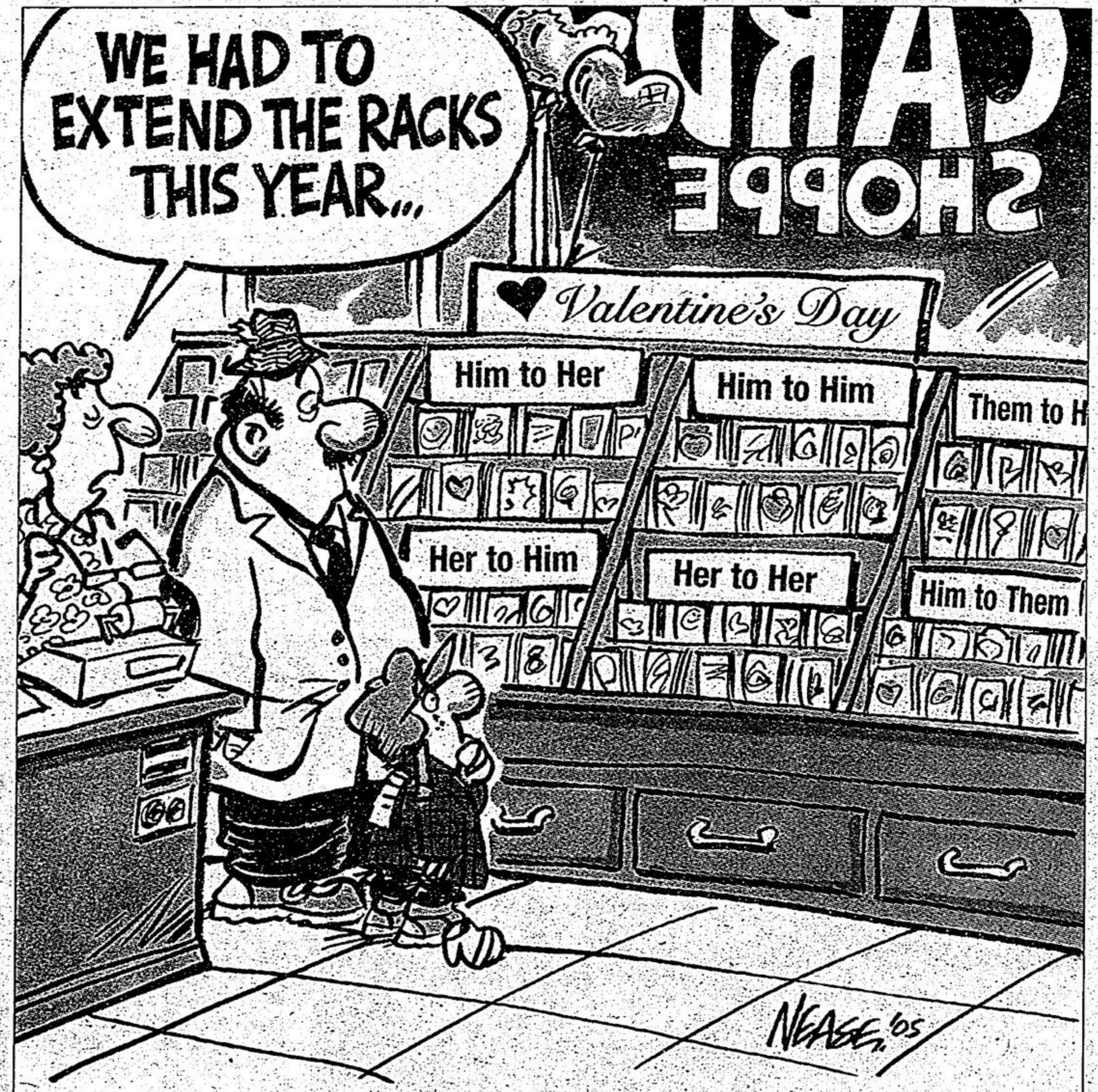
At no time did the committee discuss if salaries should be status quo or whether or not local politicians were overpaid.

Statistics of population-per-councillor clearly indicated they were well paid compared to other jurisdictions, yet they ignored these facts.

The citizens committee recommendation is flawed with so many holes, council should have taken the necessary time to analyse the proposal, but instead chose to approve it that very night.

This letter is intended to give taxpayers the other side of the story so they can determine if council is now overpaid.

FRANK V. VETERE  
MARKHAM



## Humanity needs diversity to create long-term stability

In the late 1950s, geneticists began to analyze individual genes in plants, fruit flies and mice. Instead of finding genetic homogeneity or uniformity within such specialized species, scientists discovered genes controlling specific proteins existed in many different forms.

This phenomenon is called genetic polymorphism and we now recognize such variability is characteristic of vibrant, vigorous species. But diversity is actually important on many levels.

Over the 3.8 billion years life has existed on Earth, there have been enormous changes. The Sun has increased intensity by 30 per cent; the atmosphere has changed from CO<sub>2</sub>-rich to high oxygen content; mountains and oceans arose and disappeared; warm periods have punctuated ice ages, yet all the while, life has flourished.

The key to that persistence has been diversity at the gene, species and ecosystem levels within the biosphere.

As conditions change, the "pool" of variability provides more options for adaptation to the new environment. We've learned from experience in agriculture, forestry and



David Suzuki

fisheries, that monoculture (the widespread growth of a single species or genetic strain) creates vulnerability to new diseases, pests or environmental conditions.

Unfortunately, globalization and the advancement of a single world economic model has created conditions that discourage diversity and encourage homogeneity in order to create favourable economies of scale.

In other words, a Wal-Mart is a Wal-Mart is a Wal-Mart. This has the effect of homogenizing the local cultures and diversity that may otherwise help provide resilience as conditions around us change. And this is

why it is vital to encourage diversity within and between human societies — to maintain different world views and ways of thinking.

When the Iron Curtain fell, for example, we learned Soviet secrecy and isolation resulted in different approaches to problems. As we reported on *The Nature of Things*, one technique involved surgical alterations of the cornea that has since been adapted as laser eye surgery.

I recently visited Cuba, a nation that has been deliberately blocked from the global economy by the United States and saw enough to know they have much to teach us. The Soviet collapse suddenly deprived Cuba of their main market for sugar and source of cheap oil. Pesticides, fertilizers and big farm machinery became prohibitively expensive.

It was a catastrophic economic crisis that necessitated new solutions. Today, 80 per cent of Cuban agriculture is organic and they are working toward 100 per cent. Vacant lots, lawns and yards now grow food so today, 80 per cent of leafy (non-grain) vegetables are grown and consumed within cities and towns.

I visited an urban garden of three hectares in Havana that was started by four people in 1999 and now supports 76 paid workers who all live nearby.

Local people buy the produce, which is fresher, varied and free of chemicals; dozens of people are fully employed, the environment is cleaner and people develop a deeper appreciation of their relationship with food.

By criteria of literacy, medical care, infant mortality, extreme poverty and homelessness, the United Nations rates Cuba as a developed nation. This, from a country that is in many ways cut off from the outside world.

As human population swells and our climate changes in the 21st Century, we will encounter the limits of the resources our planet is capable of supplying. If we are to feed humanity and provide a high quality of life for our people we should try to protect diversity at every level now, because we are going to need all the help we can get.

Take the Nature Challenge and learn more at [www.davidsuzuki.org](http://www.davidsuzuki.org).

### LETTERS POLICY

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