

OPINION

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Editorial

Some things better left to government

There are some things that are better left to government. Courts, hospitals and even prisons, are institutions that may include some private sector involvement, but are ultimately best run by governments in the public interest.

When private companies become involved in some areas — highways for example — the public isn't always the top priority.

And even non-profit agencies, while well-meaning, should be pushed aside when it comes to areas government may be able to run more efficiently by drawing on its huge resources and expertise.

One such area is public housing, including emergency shelters for the homeless. There's a prime example right here in York Region.

Regional taxpayers have had to come to the rescue of a failed emergency housing project operated by Transitional and Supportive Housing of York Region, a non-profit agency.

The group had ambitious plans for 15 cottages for homeless York Region families at Leeder Place Family Shelter on Yonge Street north of Newmarket.

They would have offered struggling York Region families, which are becoming more common, some dignity and security as they clawed their way back to self sufficiency.

But construction of the cottages stalled when the agency's funding, which was kick-started by a \$700,000 federal grant, fell short. The agency had hoped to raise funds privately, but that effort stumbled, leaving the development more than \$2 million in the hole.

Rather than see the worthwhile project die, York Region kicked in \$2.2 million in return for ownership of the property.

Now the partially constructed cottages will be sold or scrapped under a new plan that will see the region build an apartment-style shelter for 15 families.

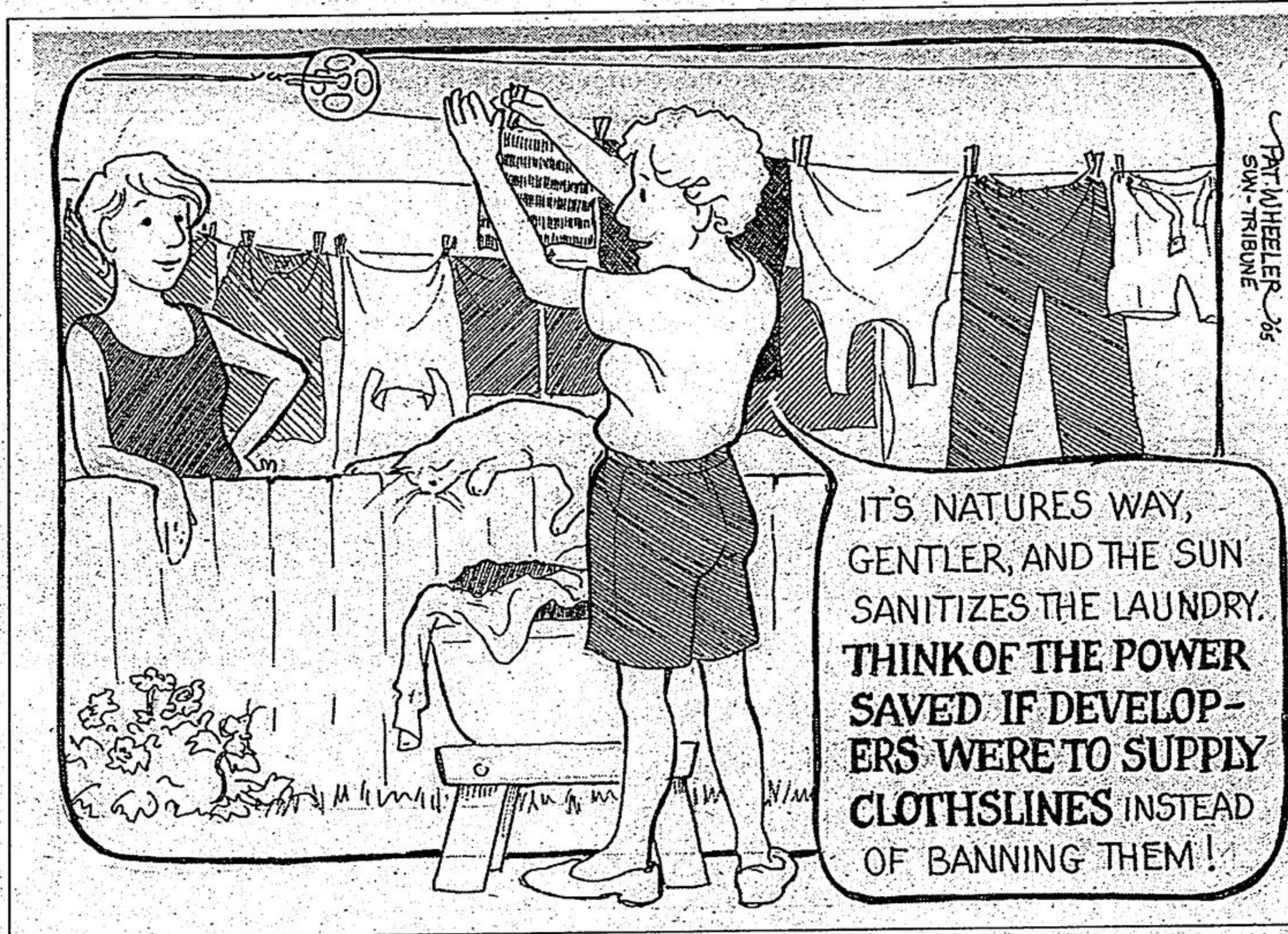
Unfortunately, social housing is now run through a patchwork of social agencies and government-run projects. This creates overlap and wasted dollars.

The cancellation of the Leeder Place cottage project is just one example.

Earlier this year, the largest conference on homelessness in Canadian history called for a national policy on homelessness. That's a good place to start.

But on the local level, perhaps it's time government took the lead on all major social housing projects, with non-profit agencies taking a supporting role by helping operating facilities.

That appears to be what's happening at Leeder Place. It's too bad it didn't happen before public money was wasted.



Letters to the Editor

Take a minute to thank a volunteer

I have seen this more than once. Someone puts their heart and soul into helping an organization, association, school or community group and does not even get a thank-you.

This person re-arranges their life with their children and spouse to follow through with their commitment and, still, no thanks. This person will show up early to help out, attend meetings and even organize them and still no thanks.

Then why do we bother helping? I ask myself all the time. It's because of the children and the community. If we keep the kids busy and involved with sports, school, outside interests, church groups or part-time jobs, it will help our community. I have always been told, keeping children busy will keep them out of trouble.

So let's all remember that in every facet of life, someone has helped us out. It starts with the local volunteer. So turn to them and say thank you.

Do not forget, it's the small things that go a long way. Remember, it can be contagious. So if no one has ever said it to all of you out there, thank you.

MICHAEL HUMPHREYS
 STOUFFVILLE

Positive message the answer

Re: Positive reinforcement still answer, teachers say, Aug. 6.

As a retired educator who taught for 32 years in three school boards in Ontario, I couldn't agree more with York Region education director Bill Hogarth's statement, "I think it's an old argument, in the business world, companies fail all the time." Remember the old adage, "If at first you don't succeed, try, try again."

Let's take a look at history in education as well as

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in the business world.

Winston Churchill did not become prime minister of England until he was 62 and then only after a lifetime of defeats and setbacks. His greatest contributions came when he was a senior citizen.

Albert Einstein did poorly in elementary school, and he failed his first college entrance exam at Zurich Polytechnic. But he became one of the greatest scientists in the history of the world.

William Faulkner failed to graduate from high school because he didn't have enough credits.

Who flunked the first grade and went on to become attorney general and went on to become president? Robert F. Kennedy

Clint Eastwood was once told by a Universal Pictures executive that his future wasn't very promising. The man said, "You have a chip on your tooth, your Adam's apple sticks out too far, and you talk too slow"

I bet your bottom dollar that each and every one of these failure/success stories as well as the hundreds of others that are out there had a teacher/mentor who saw the potential, who positively reinforced, who built self esteem and who contributed to success.

The moral of this story for parents, educators and anyone who deals with our youth: Positive reinforcement is still the answer.

ELAINE TORDAI
 MARKHAM



Off The Top

with Jim Mason

Wonder Years replaced by safer times

And suddenly, the world turned dangerous.

Back in the Wonder Years of my youth, a 10-year-old boy could take the bus alone across the city to go swimming or take in a movie, seemingly without worry.

Today, often with good reason, we don't let adults interact with children unless there are witnesses present. Heck, you can't even take a picture of your own birthday partying child on the pool deck at the Lebovic Leisure Centre. Sorry, no cameras, dad.

We didn't worry about slathering on SPF 300 sunscreen. Sun glasses were more fashion statement than eye protection. Outdoor workers and vacationing children baked in the sun all day and blistered through the night.

Bicycle helmets were only worn by geeky riders on the Tour de France.

Heck, most NHL players didn't wear head protection and the helmets worn by minor puck players were as thin as credit cards.

And when we got a ride to hockey practice — it was too cold to walk — there were no seat-belts in the back seat of the Fury wagon. And no protective car seat for your baby sister.

We didn't think about only watering the lawn or washing the wagon on designated days and hours. Same for conserving electricity or gasoline.

It's amazing we survived. There were no smog warnings, blackout warnings, UV warnings or storm warnings. The same quartet of impending doom has often been issued in the same breath this sweltering summer in Stouffville and beyond.

Today, we wouldn't think twice about riding a motorcycle without wearing a helmet, unless we were somewhere less civilized such as South Carolina.

The vast majority of us recycle, judging by the steady stream of overflowing blue boxes come Wednesday morning on our crescent.

We play by more rules. We have more information.

We Google and e-mail with so much more ease than trekking to the library and snail-mailing the way we did 15 years ago.

We live a longer and supposedly better life, bottom line.

Jim Mason is editor of *The Sun-Tribune*.

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