

OPINION

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Canada has no need for governor general

Despite the inspiring story of Michaëlle Jean, the position of governor general serves no significant purpose and provides little contribution to Canada, except for the preservation of Canada's history.

As we have witnessed with Michaëlle Jean's predecessor, Adrienne Clarkson, no impact upon Canada was made, while approximately \$9-billion of taxpayers' money was wasted on unimportant expenditures.

With Canada and the world facing many troubles, including the prospect of a receding economy due to the increase in oil prices, poor health care and poverty, is it necessary to spend billions of dollars on an annual basis to preserve our past when our present and future may be in serious jeopardy?

IMTIAZ HOSEIN
MARKHAM

Ban peanuts from schools

Re: *Banned*, Sept. 24.

Monika Pettit's view on peanut allergies is both narrow-minded and selfish. Not only does she have a misguided understanding on the dangers of peanut allergies, she also adds insult to her view by chastising parents trying to protect their children from its dangers.

Why am I taking this stance? Not because my children have peanut allergies, but because, as parents, we have a responsibility to protect all children. And if that's as simple as excluding peanut products from our children's menus, then that's something

we should do willingly.

Yes, the real world can be a dangerous place. Parents know that. We also know we can't protect our children from everything, but we can and we should protect them from obvious dangers, especially ones that can kill.

Peanut allergies are serious. It's often a race against time to get to a hospital. Children with peanut allergies have to carry EpiPens with them in case they are accidentally exposed to the product.

And contrary to what Ms Pettit thinks, children with peanut allergies are taught early in life they have it and to avoid it. Their exposure to peanut products results not from their own carelessness, but from the carelessness of others, such as Ms Pettit.

To compare an anaphylactic reaction to one of lactose intolerance shows how sadly lacking Ms Pettit's knowledge is on how the human body works. Even a layman knows that death and diarrhea are not the same. Ms Pettit might do well to visit a health professional to sort out the differences between the two.

Will Ms Pettit's conscience allow her to sleep at night if, God forbid, she ever contributes to the death of a child, because her right to bring peanut-butter sandwiches to school supersedes those who might die from it? Or could it be she is simply annoyed that the quick convenience of slapping together two pieces of bread with peanut butter for her own child has been taken away?

For the sake of all children who have peanut allergies, and for the sake of protecting them from people like Ms Pettit, let's get on and pass that law to ban peanuts from schools.

MAY YEUNG
MARKHAM



Perceived benefits of warming don't pan out

Stuck out in the cold on freezing February mornings, Canadians can be forgiven for thinking: Bring on global warming.

But new research tells us we should be careful what we wish for.

Wishful thinking about global warming isn't limited to cold Canadians. In fact, some people have suggested a warmer planet would be beneficial for humanity by allowing farmers to plant crops in areas that are otherwise too cold, for example, and by increasing tree growth and creating more lumber.

In theory, all that extra plant growth would also suck up carbon from the air, which could slow and eventually reverse global warming — handily solving the problem for us.

Sounds too good to be true and it most likely is.

However, it has been difficult to find out how plants will actually respond to prolonged increased temperatures. Experiments have been conducted on small plots using heat lamps, but these were very limited in



David Suzuki

scope and hardly mimic changes that would take place on much larger scales.

Scientists tell us we can expect more extreme weather events such as heat waves and droughts as climate change progresses.

Europe's summer of 2003 gave scientists the opportunity to examine what prolonged hot temperatures will mean for plant growth across a large area. That summer, temperatures soared across Europe, with averages exceeding the norm by 6C.

Rainfall also decreased by 50 per cent

compared to the average. It was a scorcher and 16,000 Parisians died from the heat.

Europe is fortunate to have an extensive network of scientific monitoring stations, giving scientists access to huge amounts of data. So the European Union commissioned scientists to mine those data to find out how the heat wave affected plant growth and carbon dioxide levels. The results were published in a recent edition of the journal *Nature*.

Researchers from 17 countries examined crop yield information and satellite data, along with carbon dioxide readings from 14 forest sites and one grassland site. They found Europe lost 30 per cent of its plant life over the summer of 2003. This decrease in biomass (weight of living matter) combined with an increase in plant respiration (which releases carbon dioxide) means that, during the course of one summer, Europe's forests and fields released more carbon dioxide than all its plants had sucked up over the previous four years.

Their findings do not include the release of

carbon into the atmosphere from massive forest fires that also raged during that summer. More droughts could actually speed up climate change and make the problem worse.

Of course, if temperature changes occur slow enough, it's possible forests and crops could acclimate and fare better.

But those increased temperatures could also lead to other problems such as increased pests, diseases and fires. The researchers say more studies needed to find out what to expect in the future.

We still have an opportunity to choose that future. By reducing the emissions that are causing the problem, we can slow climate change and reduce the threat.

What's more, by becoming more efficient and less wasteful, Canada can become more economically competitive right now. It will also boost innovation and creativity, setting us up to be global leaders in the future.

Take the Nature Challenge and learn more at www.davidsuzuki.org

LETTERS POLICY

The Sun-Tribune welcomes your letters. Submissions must be less than 400 words and include a daytime telephone number, name and address. The Sun-Tribune reserves the right to publish or not publish and edit for clarity and space.

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