

OPINION

Stouffville Sun-Tribune
A Metroland community newspaper
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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Habitat for Humanity better low-income housing

Re: Home ownership dream alive at project, Sept. 29.

How can a 660-square-foot condominium at a cost of \$169,000 be considered low-income housing?

Mayor Don Cousens, MPP Tony Wong and MP John McCallum, who were all at the sod-turning event for the construction of this condominium complex on Kennedy Road, appeared proud Markham really "cares" about our growing low-income population.

I'm unsure of the exact income that qualifies a family as low income, but to the best of my knowledge, it is about \$24,000 per year. Divide this by three, assuming the family pays little to no income tax, and the 30-per-cent allowable formula for housing works out to less than \$700 per month.

Should the deposit for such a miniscule condo be 5 per cent, I estimate the family would be carrying a mortgage of about \$172,000.

Taking this one step further, I figure the mortgage payments, tax payments and maintenance fees would amount to approximately \$1,250 per month.

This would give a family a balance of about \$750 per month for food, clothing, transportation, possibly baby-sitters, OHIP fees, medica-

tion etc.

Personally, I sense this family would be living hand to mouth for many years to come.

On the other hand, should our three above-mentioned politicians agree to have Habitat for Humanity come into Markham, low-income families could acquire a three-bedroom house with a finished basement, such as the one in Newmarket, for an interest-free mortgage of \$100,000, with no maintenance fees.

To me, there's absolutely no comparison. I consider this far more affordable than a condominium.

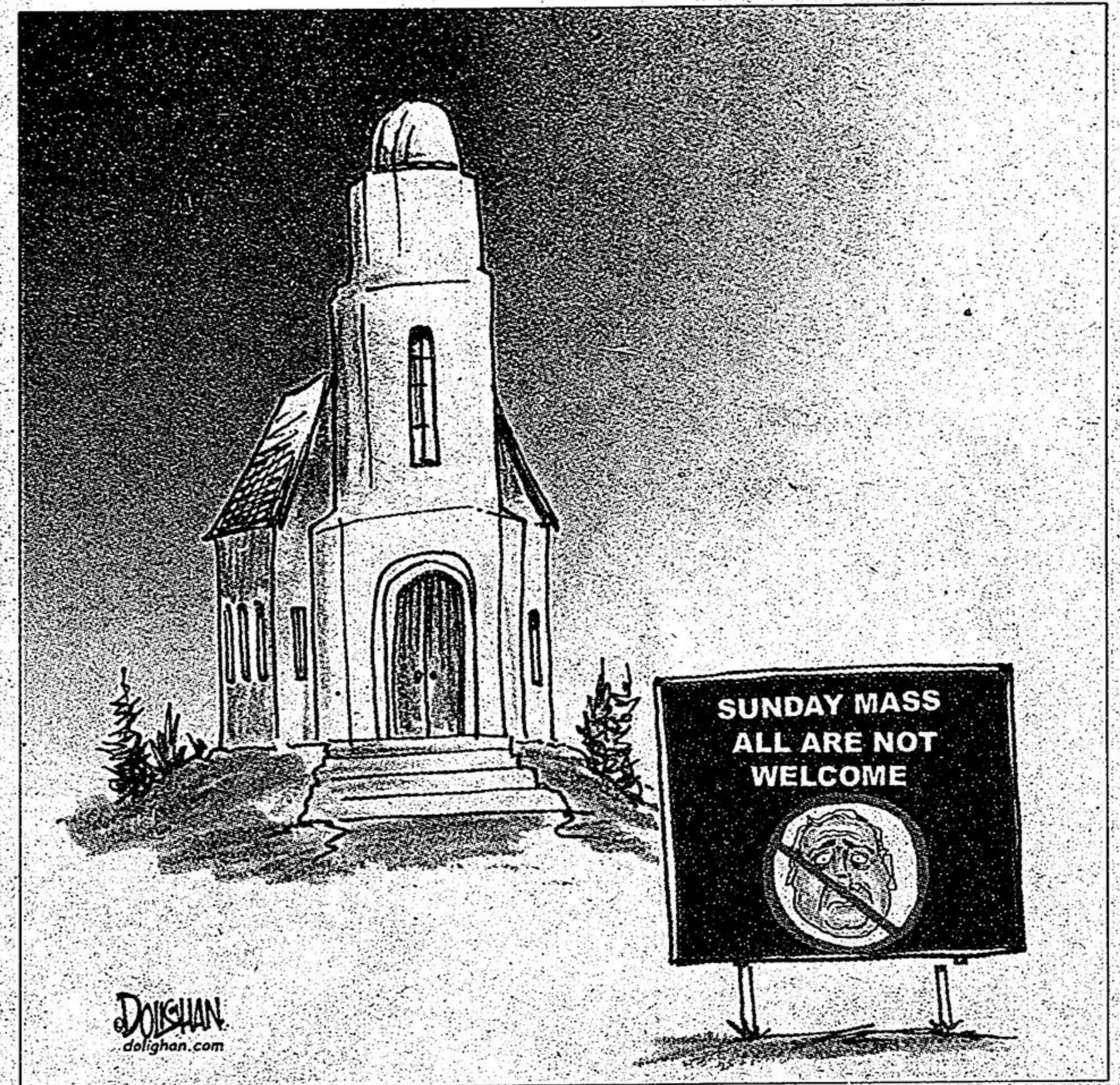
It's certainly time for Markham and the whole of York Region, for that matter, to understand what is truly "affordable" to low-income families who currently live in below-standard, illegal basement apartments, many of which are fire hazards.

Markham council turns a complete blind eye to these rental units that are advertised en masse in The Economist & Sun and other Metroland papers in York Region.

Please excuse me if my calculations are not spot on, but I sense they are within a 5-per-cent range of the actual costs.

Positive action is needed now while government subsidies are available.

JOYCE RIETTIE
UNIONVILLE



Agenda to undermine scientists alive in Canada, too

When should scientists be advocates? It's a simple question that often raises a storm of controversy.

Some argue scientists should not be advocates, period. According to this view, science is value-neutral — simply a quest for knowledge. Scientists should conduct research to reveal information about our world, but leave it up to society to decide what to do with that information.

Of course, such a viewpoint ignores the fact no activity is truly value-neutral. Even deciding what research to undertake requires a value judgment. So for most people, the question is: at what point should scientists take a stand on an issue?

Correcting misleading information in the media would be a good start.

Right now, well-heeled groups that have a lot to gain from maintaining the status quo are actively funding campaigns of misinformation to confuse the public about science issues. Some of

these campaigns are organized through conservative think-tanks based in the United States.

But their presence is felt in Canada, too.

One of their most successful strategies in recent years was to have spokespeople consistently complain about the "liberal bias" in the media. It was like a mantra, over and over.

Of course, there was no liberal bias, but by repeating the phrase ad nauseum, people began to believe it. They assumed it must be true. In response, media (in the U.S., in particular) took a sharp turn to the right.

Journalist Chris Mooney's new book, *The Republican War on Science*, chronicles just how successful and far-reaching these groups have become. He argues there has been a deliberate misrepresentation of science and an exaggeration of uncertainties that stretches all the way to the White House.

From acid rain to climate change, birth control, endangered species, stem cell cloning and more, Mr. Mooney says



David Suzuki

industry groups and the Bush administration have deliberately tried to keep the public misinformed.

Don't think this doesn't happen in Canada.

Newsrooms across the country are routinely bombarded with articles from rogue scientists or "environmental consultants" who have a story to tell. These stories are usually the opposite of the prevailing scientific opinion, but because of this conflict, media often pick them up.

That's why, even though there is no debate about climate

change in scientific circles, you still see one being played out in the editorial pages of newspapers. And that's why television news programs still find a spokesperson with an opposite view to provide "balance" to a story — even if that opinion is patently absurd.

One could argue it's the media that is letting us down. After all, the task of disseminating information to the public belongs squarely in its hands.

Having worked both as a scientist and a journalist, I can see why that argument is tempting. But journalists work on tight deadlines and with ever-shrinking resources. Journalists with specific beats who would get to know an issue in detail are becoming scarce. And science journalists are a rare breed, indeed.

Perhaps journalists could be doing a better job, but so could scientists. It isn't enough to do good work in the lab or in the field only to have your issues distorted in the press.

If those who know the issues

most intimately don't set the record straight, who will?

In a recent essay in the journal *Science*, Philippine aquaculture scientist Jurgenne Primavera made the case for scientists in the developing world to speak up, but much of what she says is universal:

"We scientists in developing countries need to come down from the Ivory Tower and disseminate results not only in peer-reviewed journals, but also through advocacy and the popular media. We must not forget our hearts even as we apply our minds. We do not do science in a vacuum but against the grinding poverty and environment-unfriendly character of modern times, and we can use our scientific knowledge to reduce suffering and make life more full for fellow humans and creatures."

When should scientists be advocates? Whenever they can.

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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Stouffville Sun-Tribune

A York Region Newspaper Group community newspaper The Sun-Tribune, published every Thursday and Saturday, is a member of the Metroland Printing, Publishing and Distributing Ltd., a wholly-owned subsidiary of Forstar Corporation. Metroland is comprised of 70 community publications across Ontario. The York Region Newspaper Group includes The Liberal, serving Richmond Hill and Thornhill, Vaughan Citizen, The Economist & Sun (Markham), The Era-Banner (Newmarket/Aurora), Stouffville Sun-Tribune, Georgina Advocate, York Region Business Times, North of the City, yorkregion.com and York Region Printing.