

OPINION

Stouffville Sun-Tribune
A Metroland community newspaper
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EDITORIAL

If region 'busted', it has partners

Stopping an expansion of York's Big Pipe now is akin to closing the barn door after the horse has already bolted.

Last week, Toronto councillors voted to oppose the \$700-million project tied to growth in King City, Stouffville, Holland Landing and Keswick.

Under a motion put forward by Councillor Glenn de Baeremaeker, a longtime nemesis of pro-growth interests in York, a committee called on the federal government to stop the Big Pipe's "massive dewatering" and asked the province to defer work in the environmentally sensitive Oak Ridges Moraine until a full environmental assessment is done.

When the province's environment commissioner, Gord Miller, supported the committee, saying York hadn't properly assessed the impact of the project, Mr. de Baeremaeker suggested the region was "busted".

But if York Region has been busted, so, too, have the provincial and federal governments that oversee these things.

York's future growth plans are not secret — they're well documented in a provincially approved official plan. And it's obvious, for that growth to happen, the Big Pipe must be used to ship sewage to Lake Ontario, where it is treated.

York's Big Pipe expansion also received

approvals and underwent scrutiny by the provincial Environment Ministry, Ministry of Natural Resources, Toronto Region Conservation Authority and federal Fisheries Department.

Many York Region residents, tired of the inevitable congestion that comes with more homes and businesses, would stand up and applaud Toronto's efforts to stop the Big Pipe.

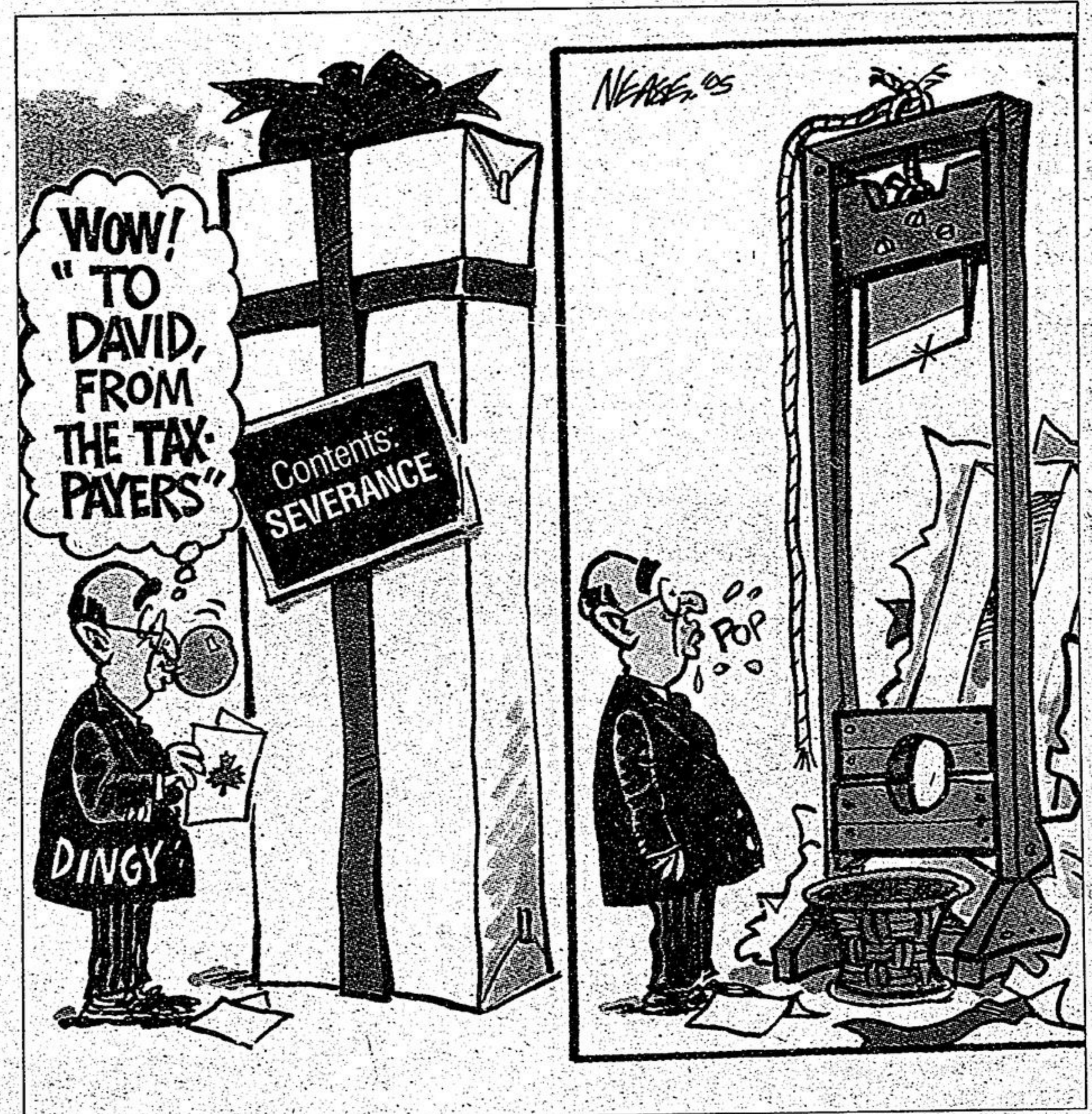
But, as regional chairperson Bill Fisch says, the project is 70 per cent complete. Putting an end to it now may not make long-term sense — not even for the environment.

The Big Pipe is running at capacity now, with some municipal officials fearing sewers may back up into homes and on to streets if more room is not made soon.

Without expansion, high rises can't be built, developments that help curtail urban sprawl by building up instead of out. At this point, it makes sense to keep an especially close eye on the construction of the pipe to ensure dewatering does as little environmental damage as possible.

Perhaps, as a show of good faith, York Region politicians can tone down defensive rhetoric and make sure all concerns are heard.

But to put a full stop on the project now, after a large portion is already in the ground, is not the best use of public resources.



Canada's environmental record disturbingly lacking

For as long as I can remember, being Canadian has always been an immense source of personal pride.

We live in one of the greatest countries in the world — which is all the more reason why I'm so disturbed at where we are heading.

Last week, my foundation released a comprehensive report on Canada's environmental performance compared to other industrialized countries. It shocked me, although I suppose the writing has been on the wall for some time.

Still, it was disturbing to see just how poorly Canada's environmental record stacks up to other wealthy countries.

We rank 28th out of the 30 member countries in the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) based on 29 key environmental indicators — things such as air and water pollution, heat-trapping greenhouse gas emissions, pesticide use and more.

Our performance is only marginally better than the two countries at the very bottom, the United

States and Belgium.

It's not as though we're just bad in one area. We're consistently awful: energy consumption - 28th, greenhouse gas emissions - 26th, water consumption - 29th, sulfur oxides pollution - 27th, number of species at risk - 26th, nuclear waste - 30th and the list goes on. In fact, Canada did not place first in any of the 29 indicators.

We are decent at a few things, such as recycling, but our list of failures is long and depressing. What's more, our performance has not improved during the past decade. This is not the Canada I know and love.

Polls tell us, over and over, Canadians value our natural heritage and want to protect it for our future. Yet here we are, one of the worst environmental offenders in the world, chipping away at that heritage and threatening the health and well-being of future generations.

So how can we fix this mess?

Well, we can't really compare ourselves to all the countries in the OECD. Some, such as Turkey, rank high on the environmental scale,



David Suzuki

but only because they are still developing and don't have a large industrial base.

A more fitting comparison is to look at countries that manage to protect their environment and still have a strong economy. These countries, such as Switzerland, Denmark, Germany, Austria and Sweden are clearly doing something right. And they show protecting the environment and thriving economically can go hand in hand.

Canada's governments, at many levels, have failed us. Not because there aren't well-meaning, passionate individuals working within them to protect the

environment. There certainly are such individuals, from city councillors all the way to Environment Minister Stéphane Dion.

We rank 28th out of the 30 member countries in the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) based on 29 key environmental indicators - things like air and water pollution, heat-trapping greenhouse gas emissions, pesticide use and more.

No, our governments are failing us because there are no overarching common targets and timelines to achieve our goals. And without a road map, how will we ever know where we're going?

It has become clear to me

Canada will continue to spin its wheels and we will fall farther and farther behind other countries until we pass a National Sustainability Act, one that sets out the targets and timelines for our country to achieve sustainability.

It isn't good enough to just talk platitudes about protecting the environment. And it isn't good enough to lay responsibility in the hands of the Environment Ministry when so many of the important decisions that affect nature and our health are outside its jurisdiction.

I'm still proud of our big, beautiful country. But we are using her resources at an unsustainable rate.

It's already affecting our quality of life and things will only get worse until we take decisive action, as other countries are already doing quite successfully.

If we want our country to continue to be one of the greatest in the world, we must change. We need a National Sustainability Act and we need it now.

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

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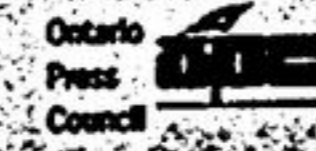
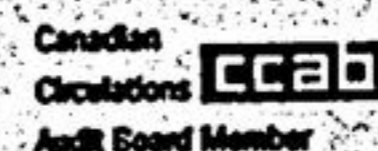
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Sun-Tribune

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 Torstar 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.