

# OPINION

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## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Small fixes can go long way

Re: *Fatality leads to Ninth Line studies, Feb. 13.*

After reading the article, I was quite upset with Mr. Bannons accusations of residents speeding through the community and of council proposing three studies regarding the safety of the roads at Musselman's Lake.

Come on, council, the unsafe road conditions at the lake have been going on for years. Is this your way of delaying again?

I drive this road a minimum of twice daily at this time of year, most times at night or early morning. Very seldom do I see a resident driving too fast or in an unsafe manner. The residents know the poor condition of the road around the lake and drive with caution.

As for the three studies Mr. Bannon suggests, such as traffic volume and origin of traffic, let's spend that money on common sense safety items. I realize the road needs some drastic repairs, but there are issues that can be addressed while we wait.

First is the lack of street lighting on the east side of the lake and the north end of Ninth Line. Any lights that are present are old, not working, facing the

wrong way or hidden by trees.

I offer to Mr. Bannon and/or Mayor Wayne Emmerson to take a drive around the lake at night to see the immediate need for proper street lights.

Second, it is not the residents who are involved in the bad accidents; it is drivers from out of the area, as in the Dec. 10 fatality. It would not matter how many safety features you had, some drivers simply do not pay attention or drive safely as was this case.

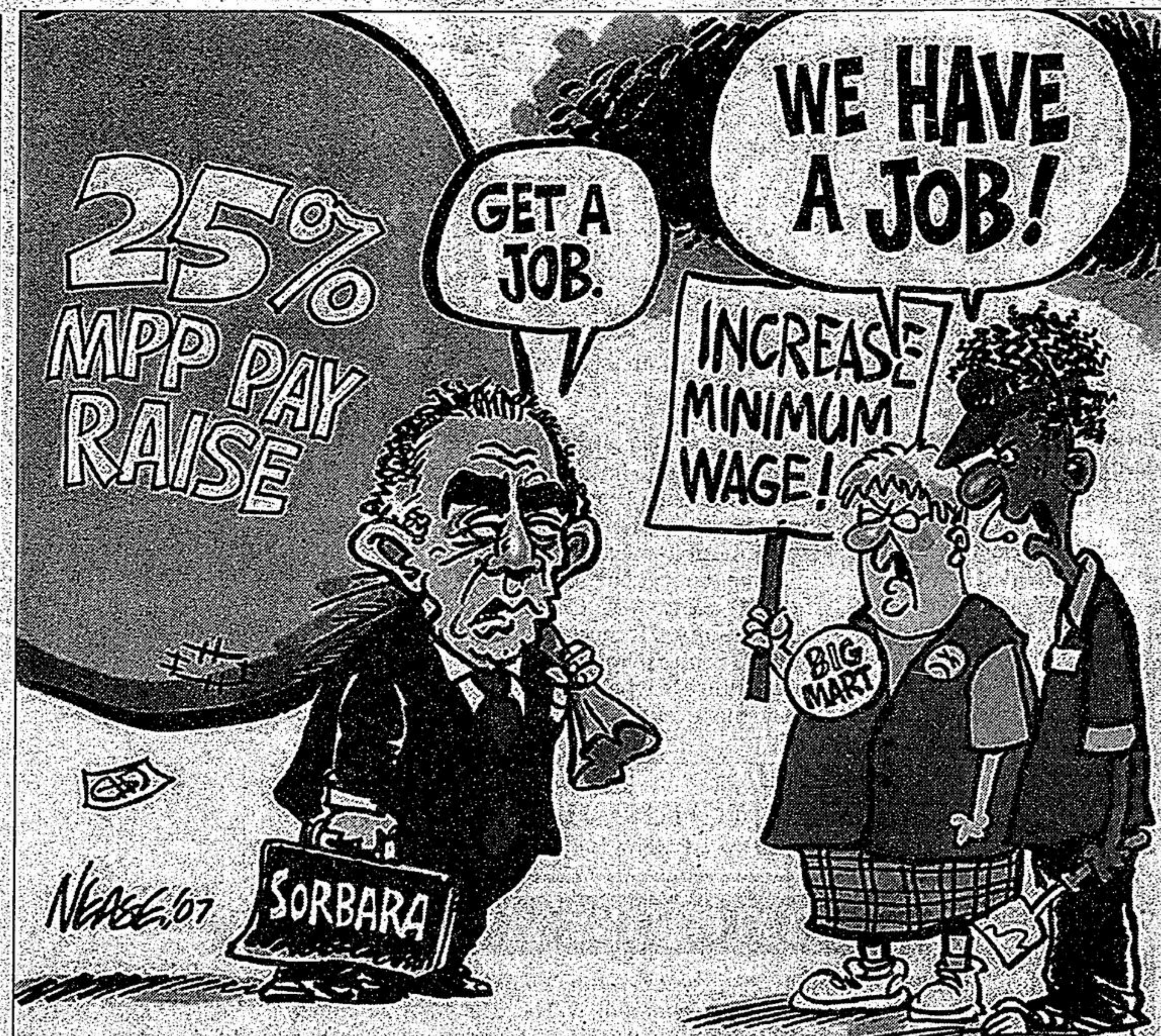
To address the issue of making the road safer for out-of-towners, let's put up warning signs at both ends of Ninth Line.

I agree with Mr. McNeil in his letter to the editor of Jan 20 a couple of speed humps placed strategically will certainly slow down the traffic.

I also offer my time for the committee Mr. Bannon is proposing to discuss safety issues on the roads around our lake.

Let's not throw more of our hard-earned tax dollars to consultants and waste more time when common sense safety initiatives can be installed immediately to improve safety around the lake.

**BONNIE JACKSON**  
— MUSSELMAN'S LAKE



# Agricultural policy strictly for the birds

**H**ow do you feed 9 billion people? It's a daunting question, but one we need to ask ourselves if we hope to feed humanity without severely degrading the earth's natural systems.

It may be hard to believe, but when I was born in 1936, there were a little more than 2 billion people in the world. In my lifetime, that has more than doubled.

Today, United Nations' population estimates show between now and 2050, another 2.9 billion souls will be added to our little planet. That's a lot of mouths to feed. But feeding them is just part of the challenge.

Current intensive agricultural practices have unwanted side effects, from pesticide use and fertilizer runoff, for example, that can harm wildlife, pollute water and otherwise damage the natural systems for our health and well-being too.

So the question really is, how do we sustainably feed 9 billion peo-

ple? A new report published in the journal *Science* provides us with some indication.

As part of a comprehensive study, researchers at the University of Reading in England looked at bird population trends to develop a threat-based risk assessment model that will predict the impact of agricultural practices on biodiversity and ecosystem services.

Birds are especially relevant for such a study because they can be very sensitive to agricultural practices. Populations of wild birds in the United Kingdom have plummeted by nearly half since 1970 and the government has committed to reversing the decline by 2020.

Unfortunately, according to the assessment in *Science*, government policies designed to help the birds don't go far enough and, unless they are changed, bird populations will continue to decline.

Researchers developed their "crystal ball" assessment model by examining three basic needs for all birds: they all need a place to nest,



David Suzuki

they need a place to forage for food and they need to be able to find food in their forage areas.

The model also takes into account how vulnerable specific bird species are to changes in any of these areas.

Some birds, for example, will only nest in a few specific types of bushes. If those bushes disappear, so do the birds.

To test their model, the researchers examined the major factors in which agriculture in the U.K. has changed and intensified

over the past 40 years.

These include: switching from spring to fall sowing, increasing chemical fertilizer use, the loss of wild natural areas, increasing drainage of the land and increasing intensity of grassland management. When they plugged these changes into their assessment model and looked at what it predicted would occur to 57 bird species, the results strongly correlated with actual historical data.

In both their matrix and in reality, bird populations fell as these agricultural changes became more common across the country.

Next, researchers used their model to look at the future of 62 bird species. Much attention in the U.K. has been paid to the importance of conserving hedgerows to protect birds. Indeed, hedgerows are important nesting habitat. However, when researchers used their model to predict the future of these species, it came out as rather bleak. Most of them continued to decline, even if hedgerow conserva-

tion measures were successful. It turns out that the birds' future depends much on what happens in the fields, not just the hedgerows, so changing farming practices will be essential to their survival.

Predicting the future of species using this kind of analysis is never going to be perfect, but it's an important and useful tool. As the researchers point out, "Unless the footprint of agriculture is carefully managed through sustainable development, both agricultural systems and remaining natural ecosystems will suffer further degradation, increasing the proportion of the world's species threatened with extinction and further limiting the ecosystem services they are capable of providing."

In other words, status quo isn't really a healthy option for humanity or the rest of nature, so we'd better use every tool at our disposal.

Take the Suzuki challenge at david.suzuki.org

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