

# OPINION

**Stouffville Sun-Tribune**

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## Editorial

### Proposed act would put bite on secrecy

The way our local governments do business should now be more open, thanks to recent legislation that gives citizens a new tool to challenge closed-door council meetings.

As reported in this paper, changes under the act that governs municipalities make it possible for people to challenge a council's decision to discuss matters behind closed doors.

While this is a good first step, it simply doesn't go far enough.

For one thing, this change only deals with municipal councils and their committees.

Other public institutions such as hospital boards, school boards, police services boards, local health integration networks and the Ontario Municipal Board either operate under rules that allow them to exclude anyone they want from meetings for any reason, or offer the public no way to challenge decisions.

While these institutions have a huge impact on the lives of people in York Region, there are still no consequences for a council that breaks the law, other than a public report that confirms they did.

One Ontario MPP has introduced a private member's bill, the Transparency in Public Matters Act, that would force meetings of the above institutions, as well as local councils, to be open to the public and would also allow citizens to stand up for their right to know how decisions are made.

If passed, this act would allow Ontario's information and privacy commissioner to disallow any decision made during an improperly held secret meeting.

Citizens across York Region get frustrated when they are stonewalled by the very organizations created to work on their behalf.

To have real democracy and protect the public's right to attend meetings and learn about what is being done in their name, Ontario needs strong, enforceable laws that make it not only easy but, in many cases possible, for everyone to participate in the process.

The Transparency in Public Matters Act goes a long way toward making that a reality.

Its death, on the other hand, would do nothing to stop the disenchantment many people feel about the political process. Queen's Park would do well by all Ontarians if it gave this act two thumbs up. Aurora Mayor Phyllis Morris said it best: "The public's business should be conducted in public."

We couldn't agree more.



## Off The Top

with **Jim Mason**

### Showing class in the face of big-time tragedy

The driver of the mega SUV in the Nofrills parking was not alone in making a profound impact on my weekend.

Apparently, I upset him with my choice of parking spots to the point he flashed a single-fingered salute as he thundered by my much tinier truck.

I could be wrong, but I don't think he was telling me I was No. 1.

Guess I didn't realize he was eyeing the spot from two rows away. And it wasn't exactly Yorkdale Shopping Centre on Christmas Eve. There were other spots open, pal.

On the flip side was a woman on CNN Saturday morning, a reporter's microphone in her face.

She was standing in the rubble of what had been her family home of four generations.

The tornadoes that ripped through central Florida Friday left her homeless. But she was smiling so sweetly, ever grateful for finding the family Bible, complete with the names of her ancestors, in the heap of brick and drywall.

"Everything else can be replaced," she said so matter of factly.

If anyone had the right to flip the bird or lash out with a string of expletives, it was her and her neighbours who lost relatives and friends in the sudden storms.

Same for the families of the five boys killed in a stormy crash in Georgian last month, including the Fitzgeralds of Stouffville.

The day after the crash, some of the parents visited the friends of the deceased to comfort them.

Morgan Fitzgerald's family took the time and the love to thank this community in a message posted on the sign at Bridon Motors.

They phoned The Sun-Tribune to thank us for the coverage of Morgan's funeral. So did some of Morgan's friends.

Somehow, losing a job, a Super Bowl wager or even a parking spot pale by comparison.

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

## Letters to the Editor

### Food bank grateful for abundance, thanks to Christmas drives

The executive and volunteers of Whitchurch-Stouffville Food Bank wish to thank the community for the overwhelming support during the Christmas season and into the new year.

We have an abundance of food to satisfy needs for the next several months.

To all who have provided help in the giving of time, money or food, we sincerely thank you. Our needs have been met and those who feel the need to use the food bank have been well provided for.

This community is amazing in the many ways it reaches out in love.

We received help from churches, schools, businesses, corporations, service clubs, banks and many individuals, each enabling us to be a blessing to many families.

**ESTHER POWELL**

WHITCHURCH-STOUFFVILLE FOOD BANK

### Would we tolerate conditions in northern Ontario schools?

After Christmas, Stouffville Lion Tom Winters gave us two boxes of children's articles to send to Attawapiskat, Ont., a Cree reserve on James Bay.

The articles arrived in the community and are being distributed to the children in the elementary school.

These students have been in portables for seven years. Their school was condemned in 2000.

Their new school has been put on hold until

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2016 or 2017. Would we tolerate this situation "down south"?

Do we think this is the best learning environment for our fellow Ontarians? No gym, no library, heating problems, infestations of mice and over-crowding.

The reality is Canada's government funds First Nations schools in northern Ontario at the rate of 50 per cent, compared to southern schools.

No wonder the United Nations is offering international assistance to our fellow Ontarians. Shame!

We thank the Lions for their gift and the school supplies and sports equipment sent by Stouffville United Church and St Mark's Roman Catholic Church in recent years.

We need Canada's government (that means us) to fund schools on reserves as provincial governments do for every other school in this wealthy country.

York Region public school board's budget for 2006-07 is \$893 million; four C-17 planes cost \$3.4 million.

**LOVANNA & JIM SANDERS**  
STOUFFVILLE

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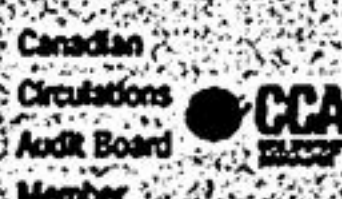
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