

OPINION

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Sun-Tribune

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Hospital parking expensive, inconvenient

Over the last couple of months, we had to make a series of trips to Markham Stouffville Hospital and the adjacent medical centre.

We were pleased with the quality of service and almost non-existent lines. One of us even made it to the MRI on a day's notice. We are so fortunate to have this hospital in our community.

But I am afraid that's where the accolades end, because outside it's quite a different story. Every time we enter the parking lot and are forced to go through the same gambling routine of getting a parking pass, the hospital loses credibility.

Most of the time, it requires running between three or four stations to weed out machines that do not work, are out of change, refuse to accept perfectly good bank notes or fail to return coins when it can't print a pass.

Being seniors, we empathize with the elderly people — most of them already having a hard time getting around — who are forced to struggle across icy patches in search of a machine that works and then back to their cars to put this sticker on the dashboard.

As a rule, people our age do not enjoy fumbling with automated equipment, let alone trying to figure out how little parking

we will get for our money. That is not clearly shown until the ticket comes out, therefore most of us tend to overpay to avoid getting hit with a nasty fine.

To make sure everybody is aware: it's \$5 for an hour and, as very few visits are less than that, we often take the next step for another \$5, just to be sure. It's more than we have ever paid to park in the centre of Toronto. It's also equivalent to a day's groceries for some.

It puzzles us why there should be a parking fee at all. Throughout Markham and Stouffville there is not a single medical centre, doctor or dental office charging for parking and many have limited or shared spaces.

We could accept a nominal charge for maintenance of the lot and the former method seemed equitable. We were charged for actual time used, taking into consideration seniors and other special situations.

We have been informed this is controlled by an outside agency and the hospital only gets a portion of the take.

While we agree Markham Stouffville should get all the financial support possible, it is also our view it would be better served by returning to the original parking system, which would rekindle our desire to support the hospital, as we have done since it opened.

BILL AND JEAN GERAATS
UNIONVILLE



Hope emerges as cross-country tour comes to end

Exhaustion. Exhilaration. Self-doubt. It seems like I've been assailed by these emotions daily on my cross-Canada bus tour.

With up to three speaking events a day, along with a constant barrage of media interviews, punctuated by hours of driving on the open road, the emotional peaks and valleys are truly draining.

But of this much I am certain: this is a great country.

Looking out across the vast, windblown blanket of snow the Prairies are hypnotic.

And yet, I can't help think that in spite of the vastness of this land and the great distances between us, Canadians seem to share a common set of values I have been lucky enough to have experienced firsthand.

Canadians, I have learned, have a profound love of our land and our natural spaces. And they want to take care of them for our children, and grandchildren.

They feel as if they are already

seeing the early stages of global warming and are concerned about what it will mean for the future. They want to help, to do their part. And they have an innate sense of fairness — we should all be doing our share.

The passion with which people have expressed their views has been, at times overwhelming, but these stories are the very reason why we did this tour.

It started with a seed of an idea. Long before TV, cars or cellphones, entertainers would load a tent and all their regalia on wagons and move from town to town.

When their tents went up, people gathered to share ideas as well as music, acrobatics and theatre. Eventually, a permanent site for annual gatherings was established in Chautauqua, N.Y. and it became a magnet for people wanting to engage in public discourse.

A few years ago, I began to float a modified version of a Chautauqua. Why not take our ideas on the road, I suggested going to communities



David Suzuki

to find out their concerns and to talk about emerging global environmental issues?

The idea took root in recent months as, during the past year, reports about water shortages, fires, floods, heat waves and hurricanes suddenly showed us such problems were no longer just happening somewhere else, they were happening at home too.

As the Inuit have been telling us, global warming can no longer be seen as a slow motion catastrophe; they are seeing it happen in the

Arctic right now.

In addition, Al Gore's film, *An Inconvenient Truth*, had an explosive impact on the public psyche, while books such as Tim Flannery's *The Weathermakers* and George Montbiot's *Heat* ramped up public awareness and concern about climate change.

So we started planning, but we knew we couldn't just blow through communities; we needed the conversation to carry on after we left.

Our hope was to act as a catalyst to conversation, a dialogue about community, provincial, federal and international issues, starting at the local level.

We contacted local community groups in cities on our proposed route and asked if they would partner with us and organize the events to enable us to gather with local people.

Those local organizations have been amazing and critical to the success of the tour.

When we set off from St. John's, Nfld., we had no idea what to

expect. But the response has been incredible.

To date, we have recorded hundreds of video testimonies from people telling us what they would do for the environment if they were prime minister. And we have collected thousands of ballots voting for the environment.

Sustained applause and intense discussion during the question and answer sessions indicates to me a hunger for such discourse and a desire for real action from our political leaders.

So here we are, nearing the end of the tour, having met with people in dozens of communities across this vast country.

It's an experience I wish I could share with everyone, because it has changed my life.

Next month, I celebrate my 71st year filled with new hope and optimism for the people of this country.

Take the Suzuki challenge at www.david-suzuki.org

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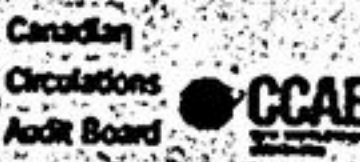
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