

OPINION

Stouffville
Sun-Tribune

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Editorial

Make trustee spending transparent

There are a lot of ironies in the current fuss over spending by school trustees.

It was big trustee salaries and the building of supposedly Taj Mahal-like administrative buildings that helped propel the Conservatives to power in Ontario in the 1990s. They slashed trustee powers and salaries and, some might say, declared war on teachers.

Later, it was attacks by trustees, including then trustee Kathleen Wynne, over government heavy-handedness and the appointment of supervisors when trustees refused to cut costs, close half-empty schools or balance budgets, that helped undermine the Conservative government of Ernie Eves and usher in Dalton McGuinty's first term.

Now it is Ms Wynne, as the province's education minister, who is taking the same steps she so denounced when it becomes clear that, when a public official is left to set his own salary or perks, you are asking for trouble.

Why does this happen? It is tough to say.

You might argue many who run for public office have a high opinion of themselves — they are the proverbial cat's pyjamas. When they talk about their work, they make comparisons to the responsibilities shouldered by the CEO of Exxon.

Allow them to pay themselves what they think they are worth and, well, \$1 million might do it. If they can't have that, perhaps a car, cellphone and travel allowance is in order. Any questionable expense that can be billed to the public is OK, too.

Ask them to balance the budget — as is the law and was the law when they were elected — and, like Ms Wynne when she was a trustee, they think they know better.

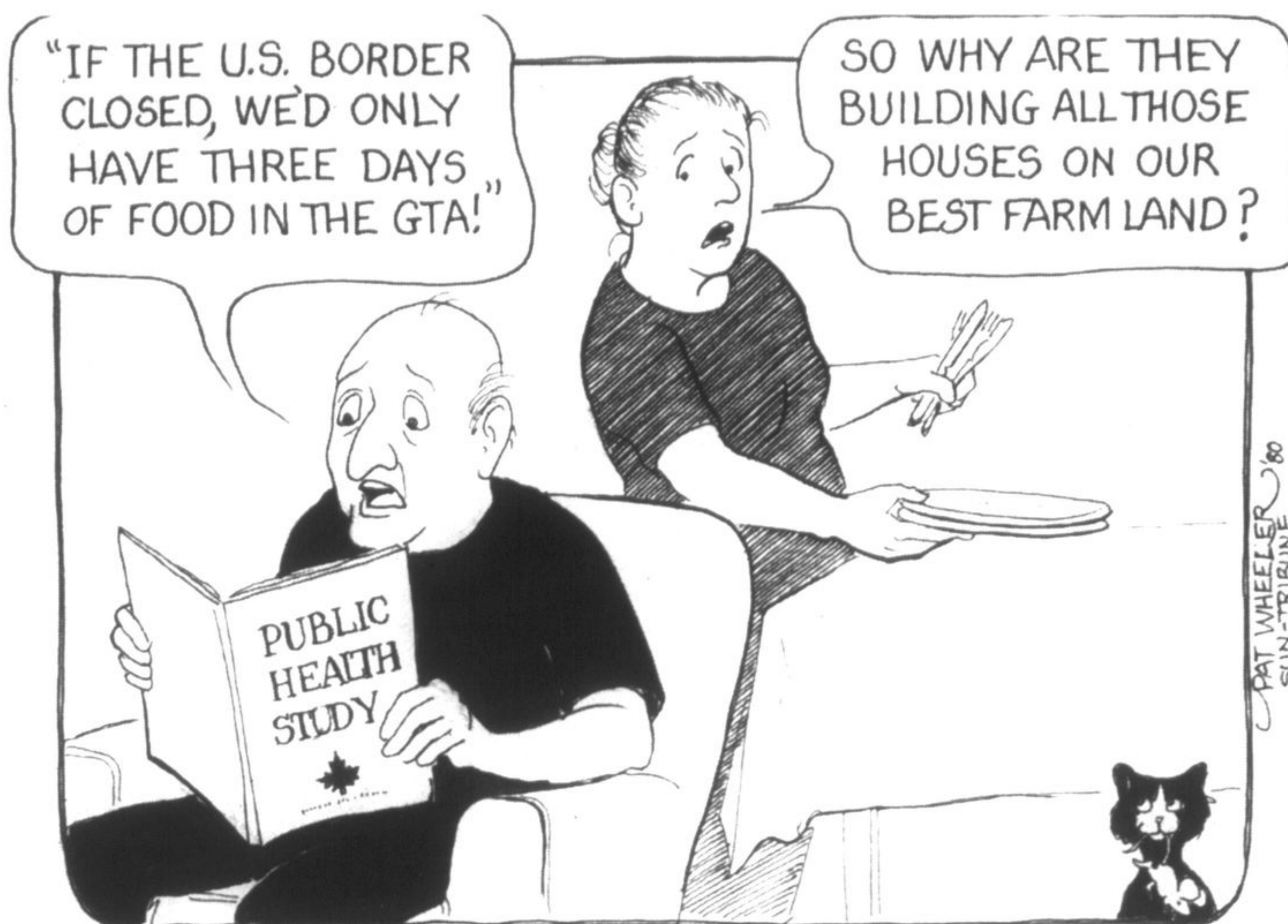
But it's not just the Toronto Catholic board, but seven others, including both in York, where spending raised a red flag and the province wants an explanation.

In its defence, the local Catholic board is saying spending is at an acceptably low level and besides, we can't compare what they do with other boards because they use different methods for recording expenses and allow trustees to claim different expenses than other boards.

That is fine and for now, at least, there is no reason not to believe them.

But what York Region residents would really like is a standardized system for all boards in Ontario so we can compare apples to apples and see what kind of results we are getting from our trustees compared to others.

Trustee shenanigans are a longstanding concern in Ontario and it is surprising to learn it has still not been brought under control with one system for all boards.



Off The Top

with *Jim Mason*

Big shooter just another player on this team

Keith Acton is one of the biggest of shooters here in this still small town.

Now 50, the kid from Burkholder Street has lived the Canadian dream.

A 28-year career in the NHL. Name on the Stanley Cup. Named to the NHL all-star team. Name on the back of a team Canada jersey at the world championships, twice. Assistant coach with the most storied, be they inept, sports franchise in the nation, the Toronto Maple Leafs. Beautiful family and a restaurant in the home town.

But, on a Friday night in that home town, he was just a face in the crowd, happily.

And not just any gathering. It was an elite bunch with a common bond those of us on the outside cannot fathom.

They were the survivors of cancer honoured at Relay for Life, a Canadian Cancer Society fundraiser, held for the second time in Whitchurch-Stouffville, at Willowgrove.

The magnificent McCowan Road multi-purpose facility was a sea of tents, memorial candles and T-shirts of all colours for the overnight relay.

But, mostly it was beaming faces. Of people who had beaten the dastardly disease, those still battling it and others remembering those lost in the trenches.

"The best team ever," as Mr. Acton, who beat testicular cancer more than five years ago, called them at another event.

They came from all age groups and all of our neighbourhoods. From the church up the street, the seniors' club, the hockey rink and the local school. A true cross section of Whitchurch-Stouffville with that common bond.

They can share tales of lost hair, chemo and radiation, the ultimate in fear and the deepest of faith.

On this night, Keith Acton took the highest of roads, talking about beating cancer, just as the sky cleared. About the people, usually family, who backed the survivors through the darkest of days.

Then he took his place in the crowd for the first lap of the relay.

Jim Mason is editor of The Sun-Tribune.

Lose penny, lose lots of good sayings

The recent call by an MP to do away with the penny made me feel sad.

Not just because it has become rare to find an MP who knew the value of a dollar, let alone a penny, and I would hate to think one had been elected and I had missed it.

Rather, it was that the coin's demise might mean the death of a lot of colourful sayings you don't really hear a lot anymore.

See a penny, pick it up and all day long you'll have good luck. We're counting our pennies. He's a real penny-pincher. A penny for your thoughts. Penny-wise, pound-foolish.

Once the penny is snuffed out, sayings associated with it can't be far behind.

Hopefully this idea of quashing the penny will never come to pass or gasoline prices will be going up a nickel a litre every other day instead of a penny.

But it is interesting to think it costs the government more than a penny to make a penny.

If we could all bring in those pennies that are sitting in desk drawers and glass jars, maybe the penny crisis would be averted.

Then the politicians could get back to nickel and diming us to death. (Some day, nickels and dimes will be gone and they'll resort to loonieing and toonieing us to death, which is tough to say and even harder to spell.)

Ever notice how many of them



Bernie O'Neill

present tax increases in terms of how many pennies a day it will cost us, trying to make it seem like we're silly to be concerned?

A 3.9-per-cent or 4.9-per-cent tax hike (they're smart to not make it 5 per cent) is presented in terms of how many cents a day it would cost the average homeowner.

They don't mention the homeowner who already thinks he's paying too much at \$1,550 a year will now be paying \$1,600.

But the point is, it all adds up. Opposition MPs who were against a cut to the GST, or provincial politicians who never offer to cut the PST, won't say so. When it comes to giving us a break, they say, "Why would you want a penny back?" When it comes to hiking taxes, they say, "Why would you fuss over a penny?"

I was thinking about pennies, nickels, dimes, quarters, loonies and toonies this week as our household looked ahead to the

summer and what my sons are going to do to keep themselves occupied.

We've got a few good things planned but there are several large gaps in the calendar. No pen marks in there whatsoever.

I jokingly wanted to write, "Watch TV, all week," or "Sleep in really late, until one of your parents gets home," but that might be a little too close to reality and I don't want to leave behind extra evidence when the Children's Aid Society shows up.

I'd love to send them to summer camp every day — a different type of camp each week, sports, music, drama — heck, why not specialize: basketball camp, water skiing camp, drum camp — but I fear that's too much like school or putting them in a kennel.

And I was the one who wanted to spend summers goofing around with them, not some camp counsellor. That's why we had them.

Besides, it is expensive.

There's that one camp that advertises, "Send us your child for a week and we'll send you back a new one," and you think that would be good — maybe the new one wouldn't notice that I had to sell his bicycle, iPod, video game console, desk, bed and most of his other possessions to pay for it.

Although my kids don't need boot camp, just fun.

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A York Region Media Group community newspaper. The Sun-Tribune, published every Thursday and Saturday, is a division of the Metroland Media Group Ltd., a wholly-owned subsidiary of Torstar Corporation. Metroland is comprised of 100 community publications across Ontario. The York Region Newspaper Group includes The Liberal, serving Richmond Hill and Thornhill, Vaughan Citizen, The Era-Banner (Newmarket/Aurora), Markham Economist & Sun, Georgina Advocate, York Region Business Times, North of the City, yorkregion.com and York Region Printing.