

Caledon Citizen

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Editorial

Tax increase was 'as good as we're going to get'

Show us a person who really enjoys paying taxes, and we'll show you the product of very vivid imagination.

Show us a person who thinks taxes should be abolished, and we'll either show you someone who's very selfish or a knucklehead.

Show us a person who accepts taxes and regular tax increases as a necessary part of the society in which we live, and we'll have someone we can address in this forum, because that will enable us to talk reality.

Caledon councillors passed their budget last week, complete with a 5.7 per cent tax increase. There will be some out there who would consider such a tax hike excessive, but we have to harken back to what might have been. Late last year, council was looking at the possibility of a 7.6 per cent increase, and things went up from there. Just a couple of weeks ago, Town staff presented a budget proposal calling for an 8.1 per cent hike.

All of a sudden, 5.7 per cent doesn't sound so terrible.

Since none of us really enjoys paying taxes, it's hard to quarrel with the last-minute efforts last week of Bolton's two councillors, Jason Payne and Annette Groves, who tried to get the increase reduced even more. Payne advocated dipping into the Town's reserves to knock another percentage point off the increase.

"I'm a taxpayer myself," Payne commented after the meeting. "I would have appreciated the break."

A very good point that some members of the public might be inclined to forget; namely the tax increases councillors impose on their constituents, they also impose on themselves.

But as Town Treasurer and Director of Corporate Services Sam Jones pointed out, that percentage point reduction would have cost about \$240,000.

Council could have gone into the reserves for those those dollars that would have reduced the tax increase, but would that have been wise use of those funds? Reserves are there for a reason, and we would argue that using them to further reduce a tax increase that had already been knocked down by 2.4 percentage points this month would have been frivolous. True, people might appreciate the break today, but that would have meant \$240,000 wouldn't be available later, if needed.

It was mentioned a couple of times at last Tuesday's meeting that a recession might be in the wings, waiting to drop a load of misery on the Canadian economy. We certainly hope that won't be the case, but we have to be prepared. Taxpayers might be facing tougher times a year from now, and a property tax break might come in mighty handy. No matter what kind of tax increase council might be looking at in February 2009, there might be a very good case to be made for knocking a percentage point off of that. We know where they might be able to find some \$240,000 that were not used this year.

And as we look at what the tax increase is going to be, let us not forget what it pays for. There are a lot of municipal services many of us rely on, and might be inclined to take for granted.

Caledon fire fighters dealt with three major fires last week, scattered all over Town. Fire trucks don't come cheap, but they save a lot of lives.

Recreation facilities don't come cheap either, but a lot of families use them. Hockey arenas are busy this time of year, and outdoor facilities are going to be seeing plenty of use in the months to come.

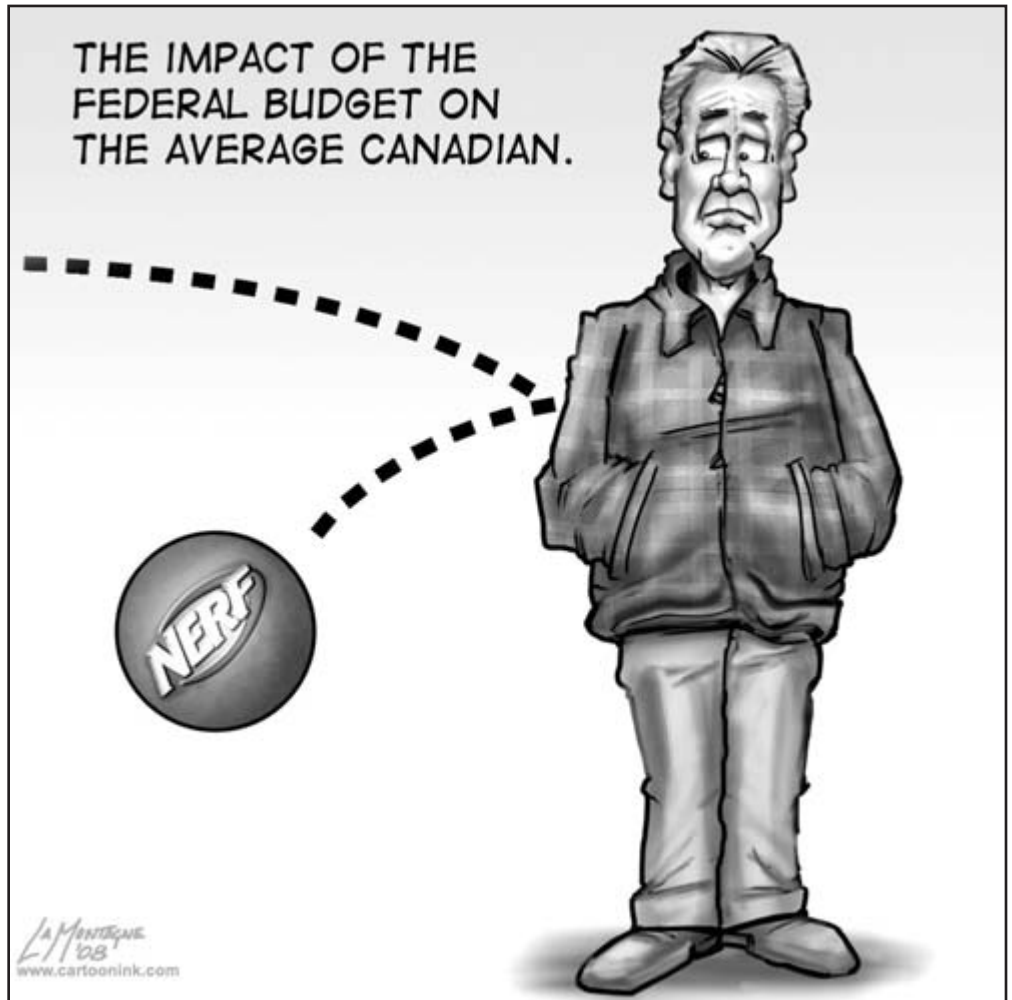
And we all drive the roads of Caledon, so we want them to be in good repair. We also want them to be safe, with the snow cleared away as quickly as possible. This has been a taxing winter on the public works facilities on this Town, and the winter is not over yet. There are financial obligations that result from that.

Councillor Richard Whitehead correctly warned against cutting back in any of these areas. "We'll pay a fearful price later," he observed.

With the combined taxes going to Peel Region and toward education, Caledon's property tax increase stands to be 3.3 per cent. True, the Region's tax increase was lower than Caledon's and education components have been frozen by the province. But the Regional and education authorities were operating under different conditions and circumstances.

Considering the demands being placed on the councillors in Caledon, they have come up with something that's appropriate for the residents.

As Whitehead himself put it, the results "is about as good as we're going to get."



Does this make me chivalrous?

Is chivalry really dead, or has it just been set aside, stored with care and love like other happy relics of the past, waiting for better times.

Just about all of us, from the time we could talk, have been told about the importance of coming to the aid of those in need. We may or may not have heard it from our parents, but we certainly did hear it from our teachers (at least I did). Granted, I went to school in another era, when such stories were permitted in the classroom, but I think the story of the Good Samaritan has been told so many times that most of us must be aware of it.

No matter how we have heard the message of how important it is to help out other people, and no matter how much certain individuals try to practice that, I think each and every one of us have fallen short on more than one occasion.

When I was 18, my parents took my brother and I on a trip to France and England.

While we were exploring Versailles and the surrounding area on a bus tour, my dad spotted a woman on the same tour who was struggling with a stroller and toddler within. He immediately stepped forward to offer a hand, directing my brother and myself to assist too. Fair enough, but it didn't end there. We stuck to this woman like glue, carrying the stroller on and off the bus, lifting it up and down stairs and curbs, etc. This was some years before anyone worried too much about issues like accessibility. Dad



Bill Rea

even collapsed the stroller and stowed it on the bus for her.

"Have we adopted these people?" I remember selfishly wondering to myself, th way 18-year-olds are often inclined (I wouldn't have dared let my father hear me uttering such thoughts).

Come to think of it, I don't know if the woman even thanked us. We were in a foreign country, so I don't recall finding out for sure if she spoke English.

To this day, I still think my dad went above and beyond the call, perhaps excessively so. I was also a little embarrassed, being drafted into being Boy Scout when everyone else on the tour couldn't have cared less. I also wondered if perhaps this woman might have thought we were going too far. Might she have felt just a bit patronized?

Was my father the type to always step up when he thought someone needed a hand?

While the circumstances were radically different, on that same trip, we twice encountered panhandlers on

streets. My father didn't bat an eye.

True, I probably wouldn't have either. I seldom give anything to panhandlers, although there have been a couple of exceptions over the years. I don't know why I sometimes would part with spare change and other times I wouldn't.

I don't believe I lack empathy for other people. I make regular contributions to charities of my choice; all worthy causes.

I did something similar last weekend.

I spent part of the Family Day weekend doing something I very seldom do. I actually took the Saturday and the Sunday off — That's right, no work at all. I wasn't even in the area.

My wife and I spent those two very restful days at a resort property in Muskoka, staying in one of a number of chalets, the use of which we were able to obtain for the period in question.

Just as there was a lot of snow on the ground here, there was a lot more in the north country. We saw a lot of people out doing winter stuff, like snowshoeing, etc. We didn't get involved in anything too strenuous, content to read, and occasionally look out the window.

It was while doing such gazing that Beth spotted a snowmobile being driven across the property.

There is a ditch, a couple of feet deep, running through the property, with a creek in the middle. I guess it was hard to this snowmobile to spot with all the

See 'We' on page 6