

# Caledon Citizen

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## Editorial

# Dwight Duncan's infrastructure announcement wasn't as great as it sounded

At first glance, Ontario Finance Minister Dwight Duncan offered up some good news recently when he announced that legislation is being proposed that would see a portion of future government surpluses go to municipalities to address infrastructure needs.

We're hearing a lot these days about how much of the infrastructure on which we depend is aging and in need of upgrading, if not replacement. As well, we are forever hearing municipalities plead poverty when it comes to addressing such needs. It sounds like a win-win situation.

But is it really that great, when more thought is given to it?

Legislation currently in effect requires that government surpluses are to be applied to the provincial debt, and that is as it should be. A government does no favours for the governed when it collects billions of tax dollars every year just to pay interest on a debt. Debt, therefore, should be paid off as quickly as possible.

This announcement from Duncan also presupposes there will be surpluses.

Government should always aim to balance its books. Granted, that is not always possible. In their basic forms, budgets are projections on what the government expects it will spend, and what revenues it will take in. Being projections, they carry a margin for error, meaning at the end of the fiscal year, there is almost certainly to be either a surplus or deficit.

Although balanced budgets are nice, there are times when budgeting for either a deficit or surplus is appropriate. Much of the government's revenue comes from taxing income and consumption (sales tax is a consumption tax). But in times of recession, incomes and consumption tend to decline, while demands on the public purse increase, especially when it comes to social services. In such situations, we can see the logic in budgeting for a deficit. And if there is a public debt, we would expect government to budget, if possible, for surpluses in order to get rid of that debt as quickly as possible. We could even go along for budgeting for a small surplus to cover the unexpected, or to set aside in case the economy goes into the tank.

But to assume there will be extra money on hand, over and above what was budgeted for, is at best a sign of bad planning on the part of the government. At worst, it's a sign of bad faith.

Duncan's plan is to wait and see if there's any excessive money, then portion it out to municipalities. The details still have to be worked out. And if there's no money available, the municipalities don't get anything extra. If there is, Duncan evidently expects municipal leaders to grovel with blubbering thanks for the table scraps they have been tossed.

Some way to govern!

Yes, municipal infrastructure needs lots of work, and yes again, municipalities simply haven't the resources to take care of it on their own. The province has an obligation to step up and help out, and there is a very easy way to do that. All Premier Dalton McGuinty, Duncan and company have to do is figure out what work needs to be done, establish a timeline for when it has to be completed, decide which projects need to be done in the first year, and set a provincial budget accordingly. The government would, of course, have to address those priorities with the other priorities for which they are responsible, such as education, health care, etc. In other words, the government would have to do the job it was elected to do. It might even mean raising taxes, or breaking campaign promises. But as we all know, neither of these items are difficult chores for McGuinty and his crowd.

Deciding what needs to be done and finding the money with which to do it is good government. Dangling the prospect of leftovers, if there are any, is game-playing.

Is that what you think governments are elected to do?



## Was good to see good hockey

It was a somewhat later night than I had anticipated, and since Thursday was my wife's birthday, my justification for not getting home before 11 was a little limited.

But I had taken certain steps ahead of time, including making sure that a bottle of our favourite "good stuff" was chilling in the fridge, waiting to be cracked open upon my arrival. All is well on that score, I'm happy to report.

The reason I was so late was I attended at the arena in Schomberg to see the local midget rep heroes pick up a solid victory against their foes from Waterford. These two clubs were playing the third in their best-of-seven series to see who would be the provincial champions, and Schomberg had a 3-0 lead in games when the ice shavings had settled.

Other work commitments meant that I missed the first half of the game. Such inconveniences go with the territory in my line of work, but in such situations, it's the end of the game that's really important.

I was heartened to see that a lot of people were interested in the fortunes of these young hockey players.

The arena in Schomberg, for the benefit of those who may not be familiar with it, has what could be generally described as adequate parking facilities. I have been covering hockey there for more than eight years now, and I think for just the second time in the period, I had trouble finding a spot. The lot was packed. I ended up having to park on the street (possibly illegally) some



Bill Rea

distance from the arena. I was in pretty good company too, as there were lots of cars on the street.

Once inside, I found the facility was packed. I hadn't seen a crowd like that since the year the Schomberg Cougars made it to the junior C provincial quarter-finals. In fact, the crowd was so dense that I could envision problems for people who might be a touch claustrophobic.

Thus I spent approximately the next hour watching and taking photographs of the action. The hockey was fairly well-played and entertaining, although things did get a little chippy towards the end (a logical occurrence, I would say, in rep hockey at that age group in provincial finals). The large crowd, including what appeared to be a respectable contingent from Waterford, was involved and enthused, and generally well-behaved. The officiating seemed to be pretty fair to me, although is such a situation, anything the refs do are going to please half the audience and annoy the hell out of the other half. A hockey official with an ounce of brains real-

izes that is simply part of the job.

It was a satisfactory evening, I thought. The only downside (depending of course on whose side you're on) was one team had to taste defeat, but that was the object of the exercise. Beyond that, it was a good night.

And I have to report it was a pretty good night two evenings later, when the Red Wings came home packing the All-Ontario trophy.

Isn't that what hockey, especially minor hockey, is supposed to be all about?

It's supposed to be a good time for those who take part, and since it involves competition, there is the possibility of the thrill of victory to make it all seem worthwhile. And if you happen to lose, well, there's always the next game, or the next season, or possibly some other sport at which one can excel. And even if you don't win, is it really that bad? As the oft-used expression goes, "It's only a game."

I know that a lot of people don't see it that way, and in my humble judgment, they're wrong.

True, in the heat of the moment, no one likes to be cheated, or see someone cheated. If a ref blows a call (and since they are human beings, they're going to blow them frequently), people are naturally going to get a little testy.

Maybe it's easy for someone me to make these lofty-sounding statements, because I spent most of my hockey-playing days on winning teams.

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