

OPINION

TELEGRAPH JOURNAL

NEW BRUNSWICK'S NEWSPAPER, FOUNDED IN 1862

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PENSION REFORM: JUST DO IT

The Alward government announced it would be adopting a shared-risk pension plan for public employees back in May, 2012. These reforms have been heralded from coast to coast, and even internationally, as a prudent and foresighted way to protect the core value of public pensions while also protecting public services.

So why is the government continuing to dicker with angry retirees?

Premier David Alward and Finance Minister Blaine Higgs have spoken adamantly, even eloquently, of the need for fundamental changes in how public-sector pensions are managed, if New Brunswick is to avoid the kind of fiscal meltdown that has scorched governments and incinerated pension benefits elsewhere. Why have they done so? Because actuaries and accountants have laid out logical, factually grounded arguments indicating that sweeping reforms are the only responsible option.

That being the case, we wish the government would act more expeditiously to implement its proposed pension reforms. If shared risk is the right model for this province's ailing public-sector pension plans, just impose it.

There is no middle ground for government to gain in the pension debate, given the intractable position that many shared-risk pension opponents have taken. They are "entitled to their entitlements," to cite another former civil servant – and if sticking with the current pension plan drives the province to slash spending on public programs or raise taxes beyond a level that New Brunswickers can bear the next time the stock markets crash – well, it seems that's just too bad, because "a deal is a deal."

The provincial government has been tolerant to the point of indulgence with these un-civil civil servants; it has even paid \$20,000 for an independent actuary to go over the new plan's accounting assumptions. At a certain point, though, cabinet needs to make the necessary changes and move on.

This government has earned praise for its courage in taking on pension reform; other provinces, such as Alberta, are starting emulate its example.

If cabinet cannot fully execute pension reforms within its four-year term, though, it may be writing its own political epitaph: "The ideas were great, but the leadership wasn't there to push the policies through."



Let stores set own hours

The Saint John Board of Trade went to Common Council this week with a membership survey on Sunday shopping. It indicated that 85 per cent of business owners who care about the issue want to set their own Sunday hours.

That seems like a substantial majority to us; to council, apparently, it does not. Council's refusal to deal with this issue directly, and councillors' insistence that they need to look out for the interests of consumers and employees, show how divorced this "pro-growth" council is from the realities of business, population growth and governance.

While councils across the province are striving to make their cities more open to commerce, and therefore more inviting to visitors and potential residents, Saint John councillors seem determined to preserve a status quo that no longer works for retailers or consumers.

The more council debates this issue, the more evident it is that councillors do not know what they are talking about.

Keeping a store open for more hours each week does not "increase overhead," it lowers overhead, because business owners pay the same capital costs for their buildings regardless of how often the buildings are open. Likewise, permitting more expansive Sunday shopping does not prevent people from going to church or spending time with their families. Provincial human rights legislation protects the right of employees to observe whatever days of rest their religions prohibit them from working.

Personal decisions such as how people spend their time and when they shop are none of council's business.

What is council's business? Serving the interests of taxpayers and striving to make Saint John a more prosperous and convenient city in which to live.

To that end – and with the knowledge that other cities have already liberalized Sunday shopping – we respectfully suggest that council give Saint John storeowners the ability to set their own hours. If council doesn't, the "status quo" will resemble the one the city experienced under the McAlary administration, with consumers hitting the highways each weekend to shop somewhere else.



Forget an inquest; try stewardship

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

BRUCE STRINGER
Saint John

Sentence must fit the crime

The opinion expressed by Mr. Randell, in the Telegraph-Journal, Friday, Sept. 13 "Public inquiry needed in Snook case" is one that is held by many. As one who has survived many years of childhood sexual abuse and who has worked with hundreds of survivors over the last few years, I have to respectfully disagree.

There is enough guilt and shame carried by many survivors and by those who honestly didn't see the signs. A public inquiry would just exacerbate the guilt held by many. You can't change what you don't know.

Can a child being abused today wait for another study? Resources could be better used in education and awareness.

There is a prevention program available. The aim of The Stewards of Children is to empower people to prevent child sexual abuse. By speaking out we put potential abusers on notice that we are paying attention.

We are in the process of setting up an organization which will allow us to offer the Stewards of Children program to every adult in our area.

All children deserve to grow in freedom without fear of sexual exploitation. What are you willing to do to protect our most vulnerable?

ELSIE MCGRAW
Saint John

Was surgery essential?

We were all pleased to see that Health Minister Ted Flemming was able to receive such quick medical attention upon discovering that he couldn't breathe through his nose. It appears that he was able to see his personal physician, be quickly referred to a specialist and undergo minor surgery within a month and a half. Do we sense a little queue-jumping?

In our family experience, the usual schedule is two weeks to see our physician (a very busy lady), more than a month for specialist referral and seven months to find surgery space. Unfortunately that surgical space can then disappear due to foul-ups.

I am not complaining about eight or 10 months to get non-essential surgery. In a cash-strapped system that seems reasonable. Minister Flemming's surgery didn't sound essential, and yet he seems to have received essential treatment.

As a Saint John citizen, am incensed that Donnie Snook might get only 12 years in prison while the Crown feels that 21 years would be more appropriate. The victims are not going to forget in 21 years or in their lifetimes.

In court, Donnie Snook gave an elegant speech, apologizing to the victims, their parents, Common Council, the schools, churches and people with whom he was connected.

Do you think this apology was sincere?

He deceived all of the above for years, so who would believe him now?

He has had nearly nine months to prepare his apology. It wasn't written overnight, and it probably didn't pull at too many heart strings.

Let's just hope that justice will be served in Saint John.

ERNESTINE SMITH
Saint John

Raise taxes to feed the young

One in four children in New Brunswick are not able to eat regular, healthy meals because their parents don't have the money to provide them. This is unconscionable.

The Common Front for Social Justice is proposing that New Brunswick return to the income tax rates of 2008, and add an additional tax bracket on the wealthiest among us to pay for such things as a universal breakfast program.

The Common Front has good ideas that will actually make a difference in the lives of those struggling with poverty. We live in a wealthy society compared to many around the world, and I know we can afford to feed our children in this province. Taxes are simply the dues we pay to be part of a civilized society, one that should be able to afford a universal school breakfast program.

The Green Party has advocated rolling back the radical tax cuts the Liberals made in 2009 since the day they were announced.

As Nova Scotia has discovered, an additional tax bracket on the wealthiest among us makes sense.

It is high time that we get our priorities straight. New Brunswickers are a caring people who place a high value on sharing. Our society's efforts to end poverty should reflect this. Let's do what it

takes to ensure all of our children start their school day with good healthy breakfast.

DAVID COON
*Leader
Green Party of New Brunswick*

Oland series causes dismay

Re: "Inside the Oland Investigation"

Is this the Telegraph-Journal I am reading? It's more like the "National Enquirer" or a revitalized "News of the World!"

The perpetrator of this dastardly crime, whomever he or she may be, will be brought to fair trial in due course.

There's no need of a bunch of hack reporters digging up as much dirt as possible so that they can act as prosecutor, judge and jury: why not have them lead a lynch mob down King Street?

I am utterly dismayed to see the names of so many good and innocent people being raked in the mud for the sake of "increased circulation."

Perhaps the publisher and editorial board should remember that when you drag someone through the swamp it is your own hands that can never be cleansed of the sludge that adheres. Enough is enough!

JIM STEWART
St. Andrews

Patients in pain need relief

I was very concerned to read a lady writing to say that hospitals are no longer giving strong painkillers for a kidney stone.

Having experienced the awful pain of stones on two previous occasions I find it hard to believe that they would leave a person in this kind of pain. If this is the case, surely experienced medical staff would know the difference between a frequent flyer seeking a fix and some genuine person in terrible pain. I, for one, would like to hear from somebody who is involved in ER care to confirm that this is the case.

St. Joe's and the Regional Hospital always gave me very quick relief, for which I was so grateful!

JOHN SHEPHERD
Saint John

Will civil servants take wage cut?

Some years ago the federal government introduced an equalization plan for so-called have-not provinces. This sounded

like a great idea to have government jobs across Canada more or less equal.

It turned out the have-not provinces hired more workers per 1,000 citizens population than the have provinces that were paying out the tax money.

Now here in New Brunswick, we have a situation of the government with at least a half a billion yearly deficit. This cannot last; something has to give.

This generation has been called the me, me, me generation. They were never called to share, like the World War Two generation, or to live on rations.

I don't know if my idea would fly today. Here it is: instead of laying off teachers and hospital workers where they are much needed, let the union workers vote to take even a five per cent wage cut to keep everyone working.

This would keep most everyone working and stop New Brunswick from losing the educated class that we so desperately need.

DONALD A. GOODSPEED
Bathurst

Let your dog be your best friend

Is there a dog who would love to be isolated outdoors, either on a chain, in a kennel or backyard, forgotten and deprived of human contact, love and compassion?

Some people believe dogs need to be outdoors to get lots of exercise when they are all by themselves waiting for you to come home. Most of the time they are lying around waiting for your attention.

Dogs who have to live outdoors are bored, lonely and frustrated and will exhibit stress by digging, barking, howling or whining, chewing, escaping have lots of behavioural problems. Dogs are pack animals that thrive on companionship, they are more social than humans and need to be part of human families.

At a minimum, your dog should have access to your living space whenever you are home, including sleeping inside your home at night.

The fact that he is able to lay beside your feet while you are watching TV or work on your computer means the world for your dog and is so very important for its mental well being.

Take your dogs off the chains, take them out of the kennel or back yard at night and spend time with him give him love and compassion and you will have a companion animal which will give you unconditional love for life.

RITA K. BIHR
Riverview