

THE RECORD



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Doctors' deal is worth reviewing

When the patient firmly rejects the proposed treatment, it is a wise person who opts for another opinion. Such is the case with the Ontario Liberals and their plan to fix the province's ailing health system.

Just one week ago, Premier Dalton McGuinty and Health Minister George Smitherman presented the province's doctors with a revised contract offer designed to address some of the doctors' concerns with the initial four-year proposal. Although the doctors thought the meeting was to be a negotiating session, Smitherman and McGuinty made it clear that bargaining was over and the deal would be imposed unilaterally, whether the doctors liked it or not.

Needless to say, the medical community was not happy. During the past week, the Ontario College of Family Physicians backtracked on its earlier support of the tentative deal, citing concerns that an imposed pact would weaken the health care system. The Ontario Medical Association sent Smitherman a scathing letter, attacking the government's no-talk position.

But what a difference a week makes. Smitherman, who has acquired a reputation as somewhat of a bully, is now holding out an olive branch to the province's 24,000 physicians. While he has not capitulated or suggested a quick return to the bargaining table, Smitherman has said that he is willing to listen to feedback from the medical association on the proposed fee changes. "If they've got some commentary about those particular content issues and the like, we'd be happy to have it," Smitherman told reporters.

This conciliatory tone is more than welcome in what could become an acrimonious dispute over the deal that was initially rejected by 59 per cent of medical association members.

While citizens will support the government's plan to improve access to doctors and reduce waiting times, Smitherman's heavy-handed approach leaves something to be desired.

Doctors are the backbone of the medical system. And physicians must support any changes if they are to be effective. The McGuinty government wants to heal the health system as quickly as possible. But when the proposed treatment is resisted by those involved, there is little hope that the ailments will be cured. It may take a little longer, but in medical matters, it never hurts to get a second opinion.

Smitherman has to spend more time listening to doctors.

Contented Canadians

On any single day, there is more than enough depressing information to make any Canadian want to spend some time on an island surrounded by a light tropical breeze with something light and breezy to read.

Our weather is too hot or too cold; our medicare system is under strain; our colleges and universities are short of money; our taxes are too high, and, finally, our hockey players have been locked out of their arenas, which is causing angst every Saturday.

Despair not. The Vanier Institute of the Family has just released a study that shows that Canadians are a happier bunch of people than anyone might have thought. Across the whole country, 85 per cent of Canadians said they were either satisfied or very satisfied with their lives. This means that when Canadians wake up in the morning and look in a mirror, the odds are better than four out of five that they feel they have something to smile about.

Perhaps the overwhelming number of positive feeling we experience seems less significant than the lesser number of negative feelings we have because negative events consume so much energy. Perhaps we focus on our complaints as a way of dealing with them — a form of self-analysis that enables us to deflect a problem by talking about it.

Interestingly, the most contented people were in Prince Edward Island. According to the Vanier Institute's report, 92 per cent of women there and 91 per cent of the men are either satisfied or very satisfied with their lives. On the other side of the statistics are the residents of British Columbia. There, only 81 per cent fit into these categories.

The logical conclusion of this report is that the people in B.C. should move to Prince Edward Island. Of course, Prince Edward Islanders might become depressed if too many British Columbians move into their picture perfect, post card-size island. No one wants that.

The better conclusion might be for all of us to count our blessings and then remember how many we have.

Canadians, apparently, are quite pleased with their lives.

Board's school plan splits Pioneer area

We are parents of two daughters, ages 10 and seven years, and we live in south Kitchener in the Pioneer Park area. We found out that if the Waterloo Region District School Board has its way, our daughters would be shipped to Preston High School and would not be able to attend the new Huron Heights Secondary School to be built in 2006.

The new proposed boundaries that outline who will go to the new Huron Heights Secondary School completely split the Pioneer Park community in half. When our daughters hit high school age, they will be split from the friendships they have made with other children in the same community — all because they happen to live on the wrong side of a road.

Apparently, the board recently proposed to change the boundaries for the new high school in order to keep up enrolment at Preston High School. There's a domino effect here: The decision to keep Southwood Secondary School open reduced the student numbers for Preston High, so lots

of Pioneer Park students have to fill up Preston High's empty seats.

A new high school is being built closer to our home and community in south Kitchener, and we would have to ship our daughters to another city and separate community. As they are presently drawn up, the proposed boundaries for the new Huron Heights school contain very little common sense.

The proposed boundaries should go down to Highway 401 and up along the Grand River. Kitchener students should attend Kitchener high schools; sending south Kitchener students to Preston is from a bygone age. For the past 10 years, we were led to believe our children would attend the new high school in south Kitchener. Some have even purchased homes with this in mind.

The board has pulled the rug out from under our feet; is it not any wonder why it is experiencing opposition here?

• *Ted and Laura Venema, Kitchener*



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Respect others' rights

Once again, the civil liberties of Ontario residents are being tested because the governing administration needs to deflect attention away from its failure to comply with its election promises.

I would ask that MPP John Milloy and other MPPs stop introducing mandatory helmet bills and deal with their personal issues in a manner that does not impede the rights of responsible, law abiding adults.

• *Rick Berenz
Kitchener*

Let adults pick helmets

I couldn't help but respond to Roger Gough's Nov. 19 letter, You Can't Argue Safety.

Until I read it, I wasn't "worked up" about the idea of a mandatory bike helmet law. In fact, I was unaware that there was talk of this legislation. I could go on at length about why I am opposed to this legislation, but I'll limit my comments to a few.

I believe that there may be potential benefit to someone who is wearing a high quality and properly fitted bicycle helmet. At least a dozen studies that I found by typing "bicycle helmet effectiveness" into a search engine all agree that the proper use of a helmet could substantially reduce the risk of head injury in a crash.

The studies also identified that many of the subject cyclists were injured while participating in high-risk activities or while riding in inappropriate places at inappropriate times or, as in an astounding number of instances, were intoxicated. Mandatory helmet laws cannot reduce the incidence of stupidity.

I am an adult and I am responsible for my own welfare and actions. It is

time that people took responsibility for themselves and instilled the same in their children. It should not be the function of government through legislation to save us from ourselves.

I truly look forward to the day that Gough buys and wears a helmet because Gough knows that it's good for him and he would be setting a good example for his two-year-old son and the rest of us.

• *Jim Ashton
Kitchener*

Many vets don't smoke

Regarding Robert A. Steele's Dec. 1 letter, Show Veterans Respect, about letting war vets smoke in legion halls, I really wish those who write on this subject would get their facts before putting pen to paper.

I am a vet. I have been a member of the legion since 1966 and I can assure you that 80 per cent of vets don't smoke. Those who do are the members who join just because they can smoke — and, believe me, they do.

In fact, this last 12 months I have had my belly full of vets passing away with illnesses caused by second-hand smoke.

So the government is on the right track.

• *Tom Hird
Cambridge*

Dairy farmers work hard

I am responding to Al Coates' Nov. 27 article, Dairy Prices Milk Restaurants And Everyone Else.

I am a dairy farmer and I work hard every day to produce a top quality product that I can be proud to sell.

When I buy a \$1.95 glass of milk in a Canadian restaurant, my share as a dairy farmer is 16 cents, while processing and other costs, which are included in the price paid by the restaurant, is 11 cents. Restaurant margin and non-milk costs is \$1.68.

When I buy a pizza in a Canadian restaurant, my share is four per cent, food costs excluding dairy is 29 per cent, salaries, wages and benefits is another 29 per cent. The other 38 per cent of the cost is incurred by operating, marketing, general administration, rents and more.

My input costs continue to increase each year. Like all other consumers, I am living and doing business in an environment of increasing energy and insurance costs and real estate values.

I make a decent living because I continue to work at being profitable, increasing production and running an efficient, well-managed operation. I don't know where Coates got his "facts."

• *Jeff Van Soest
Moorefield*

WRITE TO US

We welcome topical letters that include name, address and phone numbers for verification. All copy is edited for clarity, style and length. Writers generally are limited to 200 words and one submission in 60 days. We decline announcements, poetry, open letters, consumer complaints, congratulations and thank-you notes. The Record contacts only those people whose letters or Second Opinions have been chosen for publication.

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Consumers are well served by the dairy industry

Whitewashing is a term used around dairy farms to describe a method of a quick annual cleaning of a barn and applying a coating of white-wash (a lime slurry) to these surfaces. It's mostly a historical practice, given the large number of modern dairy barns, but it sure describes the analysis columnist Al Coates used for dairy price determination in Canada in his Nov. 27 column, Dairy Prices Milk Restaurants And Everyone Else.

The 2005 milk calendar is more than just "lovely," it's fantastic. It's brought to you by the producers of high quality, nutritious and affordable dairy products. The milk prices in Canada are not higher than in the examples cited. What's missing from the prices listed for other countries is the direct subsidies paid to those producers.

I believe this explanation covers about three-quarters of the points Coates raised in his column, but it doesn't end there.



SECOND OPINION
JEFF STAGER

The descriptions of international dairy production and prices quoted by Coates reminds me of the pitfalls of documenting the performance of stock and equity fund managers. Huge price swings and market dislocations based on selective date parameters, currency fluctuations and political considerations around election issues.

Prices in Canada have remained on much more of an even keel than most countries. Our tariff walls are high, but decline yearly, and our competitors

have tariff walls as well. In the long-term, through negotiation, world tariffs will drop, but not today. And our Canadian price determination is more public than the alternatives suggested by Coates, where the price would be very secretly created by the International Dairy Foods Association.

The complaints registered by the Canadian Restaurant Association are really just a sleight-of-hand exercise. Blaming your problems on someone else is the oldest trick in the book. Do the Big Three automakers blame the price of cars on Stelco? If Stelco gave the raw steel to the car makers, do you really think the price of cars would drop?

Just look at the beef industry now, where producers are getting nothing for the livestock, processors' profits are at a high, and the price to the consumer hasn't dropped. Why should I as a dairy producer have to lower my price so Pizza Pizza can run flashy ads and two-for-

one giveaways? Their business is selling the "sizzle," and I respect them for it, but not when a poor marketing campaign has to come out of my hide. The milk portion in a pizza is four per cent of the consumer cost.

What's the fair share for the producer, processor, and retailer? If I go to a restaurant and pay \$8 for a chicken stew meal, it would be \$9.20 after GST. The price to the producer is seven cents for the milk, five cents for the potatoes, one cent for the onions, one cent for the carrots, two cents for the celery, one cent for the peas, two cents for the bread roll, 15 cents for the chicken, and one cent for the butter. That's about 50 cents, and the GST was \$1.20.

What would happen in the Region of Waterloo if this future vision of dairy was implemented?

A quick look at the statistics section of the www.omaf.on.ca website shows we had in October 281 licences producing 9,205 kilolitres. That is 4.3 per cent

of the provincial total. These producers received between 50 and 70 cents per litre (depending on component test of protein and butterfat). That's cheaper than bottled water or soda pop.

In our region, we could lose this industry and the millions of dollars these operations add to the local economy. Any producers who stayed would need very large operations for economy of scale advantage.

Our region, blessed with excellent land, couldn't site such a large operation without expensive measures being taken. "Boiler plate" news stories out of Toronto don't accurately report the dairy industry that is part of The Record's audience.

• *Jeff Stager of North Dumfries Township is a dairy farmer and a former president of the Waterloo Federation of Agriculture. Second Opinion articles reflect the views of Record readers on a variety of subjects.*