

THE BARRIE EXAMINER

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A division of Sun Media
705-726-6537

comment

Local television must be saved

“The model is broken and a systemic solution must be found.” — Konrad von Finckenstein, chairman of the Canadian Radio-television Telecommunications Commission (CRTC), Feb. 19, 2009.

Three weeks ago, I appeared on CBC's *The National* to press for the cause of local television in Canada because I was not convinced the solution Mr. Von Finckenstein referred to was close at hand.

The pressure for action will grow if Canadians see their culture eroded by a lackadaisical reac-

Patrick Brown
BARRIE MP

tionary regulatory body. For us this could mean keeping the A Channel on the air in Barrie.

Conventional television in Canada is in crisis and a broken domestic regulatory model is resulting in the closure of TV stations and the end to local programming. Without immediate regulatory changes, more communities across Canada will lose local television stations, broadcasting infrastructure,

“Are Canadian residents going to have to watch American news because we didn't act fast enough?”

news and entertainment programming, production and jobs.

It will be a set-back for our Canadian culture and slowing economy.

Local TV across Canada is in dire straits. Global TV in smaller hubs such as Winnipeg is facing a bleak future, while other CTV stations in Windsor and Brandon were shut down two months ago.

CTV Globemedia, owners of Barrie's A Channel, have already announced cutbacks in a number of communities such as ours (Barrie's morning show was cancelled and one-third of A Channel staff let go).

Further cutbacks could seriously jeopardize the future of local television in Canada.

Local stations' only source of revenue is advertising. Like other industries, advertisers are feeling the effects of a global recession, which has caused advertising revenues to plunge. This drop in revenue for stations means the cost of running them is far outpacing the amount of income they are generating.

The A Channel in Barrie had its licence renewed for only one year, instead of the typical multi-year extension. I believe the majority of residents in Barrie appreciate having the ability to learn about local news, cultural activities and charitable events through the 'A' station.

Are Canadian residents going to have to watch American news because we didn't act fast enough to ensure the long-term viability of local television in Canada?

Is it right to allow the cable companies to charge for American news, but not provide that same financial benefit for local television such as Global (Canwest) and the A Channel (CTV)?

The question is if we accept the status quo that allows cable companies to have a monopoly over signal fees, are we not eroding culture in Canada?

If the CRTC really means what it says “the system is broken,” it should act on its words and protect local TV across Canada. It is within their power to do this by ordering fee for carriage.

I have been organizing a group of elected representatives in our parliament to rally behind protecting local television.

If you agree with protecting local television perspectives, please sign my 'Save Local Television' petition at servingbarrie.com.

Patrick Brown is Barrie's member of Parliament



■ our opinion

Public has role to play in policies

Why do elected officials and government staff ask for public involvement in the decision making process if it's only to be disregarded?

Members of an accommodation review committee, struck specifically to help decide the future of five Simcoe County District School Board high schools, must be wondering that today.

Committee members were asked to decide the fates of secondary schools in Stayner, Penetanguishene, Elmvalle, Midland and Collingwood.

The committee's decision was to keep all five open, including building a replacement school in Elmvalle. This decision was made after numerous meetings and debates involving stakeholders.

But school board staff instead recommended a three-school solution, which would include building a new school in either Elmvalle or Wasaga Beach.

Board staff say this scenario best balances enrolment numbers with long-term planning. Then there's the cost — more than \$23 million to bring the Elmvalle, Stayner and Penetang schools — to board standards.

At least one school trustee expressed concerns about the differences between what the committee and board staff recommended.

The three-school option, for example, didn't even make the committee's short list.

Trustee Brad Saunders said staff's reaction to the committee recommendation was “thanks but no thanks,” and that it was “offensive”.

He also wondered aloud why anyone would volunteer for similar committees in the future.

Trustee Debra Edwards did note that the committee's recommendation was simply that, a recommendation.

But the problem with striking such a

committee, then disregarding its advice, is two-fold. First is that it wastes the time of committee members.

Worse is that it raises the hopes and expectations of parents, students and others with a stake in the community.

Because the reality is that while public consultation is part of the process when a school is closed, it's rarely a factor in the actual decision.

The school board — trustees and staff — would have better served the public by making a decision, then inviting input that could change it.

This isn't the first time this school board has disregarded the wishes of an accommodation review committee (King Edward School is closed, Prince of Wales School is closing).

Public opinion is rarely the deciding factor in such decisions. Just ask those opposed to Barrie city council's choice to redevelop the former Allandale station property.

What's never given proper weight is that our school trustees are elected, once every four years. They have the responsibility for making decisions in the best interests of everyone they represent.

People forget this, possibly because trustees can no longer levy education property taxes (the province does it) and must work with the money they have.

School board staff are also responsible for giving trustees the best information and advice possible, so they can make an informed decision.

So why include the public? Part of it is merely optics. It looks better if the public has been consulted, even if what the public wants is not what the public gets.

But no wonder people get jaded about the process of closing schools and building new ones. It's not hard to argue the deal is done long before they're asked.

Time to return stranded Canadian

In the late 1980s, Brian Mulroney went out on a limb, deciding to throw his political clout behind efforts to release Nelson Mandela from prison.

Such a movement had been gathering momentum for a time but it was Mulroney's intervention that helped prepare the way for the South African's release.



Glen Pearson

The world responded by praising Canada's record on human rights, seen in its efforts to fight for a man lost in a jail.

But Mulroney wasn't done.

After 27 years in prison, a freed Mandela was invited to address the Canadian Parliament in 1990, enhancing this country's reputation even further.

Jean Chretien followed up by making the South African icon an honorary Canadian citizen. A non-partisan effort amongst all parties had achieved remarkable results.

When Stephen Harper accredited the Dalai Lama by meeting with him in a 2007 visit to Canada, he was pummelled by the Chinese government and went through considerable discomfort for taking a stand that eventually led to international respect for this country.

With such seminal moments behind us, it is hard to understand why Canada's government permits one of its own citizens — Abousfian Abdelrazik — to languish in the Canadian embassy in Khartoum, Sudan, with no recourse for returning him home.

“Where is that spirit that worked diligently to free a South African who had become a symbol of international hope?”

Abdelrazik had returned to Sudan to visit his ailing mother in 2003. Twice detained by the Sudanese government, then released without ever being charged, they found no fault in this Canadian citizen. Yet the Canadian government refused him the right to return.

Matters became more complicated when it was discovered that Canada might have played a role in his illegal detention.

Subsequently, CSIS and the RCMP cleared Abdelrazik of all charges. The Canadian government then promised him the necessary travel documents for his return if he could secure a return ticket home.

Canadians from across the country, including Stephen Lewis, donated the funds only to have the government change course at the last minute, demanding Abdelrazik get himself removed from the United Nations watch list — an impossible task for an innocent man locked in an embassy.

Parliamentarians from all opposition parties held a press conference, pleading with the government to bring home one of their own — an innocent citizen.

“The government has disclosed no reason to suspect he constitutes a security threat,” former justice minister Irwin Cotler said. “In these circumstances, international law expressly allows for his return to Canada, and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms compels it. The government needs to bring Mr. Abdelrazik home.”

Yet for 11 months he has sat forlorn, an innocent exile residing in a Canadian embassy.

Where is that spirit that worked diligently to free a South African with a challenging past but who had become a symbol of international hope?

Where is the Stephen Harper who faced down significant opposition to bring the Dalai Lama to Canada and welcome him with true Canadian generosity? The world watches and wonders what happened to that Canada — the one where both Conservative and Liberal prime ministers led us to a place of deep and international respect.

It is time for that Stephen Harper to show up; he's shown he's capable of it. And it's time for all Canadian citizens to bring home and enfold one of their own.

Glen Pearson is MP for London North Centre

Letters to the editor

SCHISM WAS INEVITABLE

The recent flap between Prime Minister Stephen Harper and former prime minister Brian Mulroney should come as no surprise.

After all, it was Mulroney and Peter MacKay who sold the true Progressive Conservative Party out to Albertan Reformers.

Real PCs had to know this day was coming, with Canadian Conservatives split in two.

Easterners and Toronto 416ers who have always wanted moderate social progress with economic stability, versus westerners and GTA 905ers, who've been steadily moving us toward an American-style right wing ideology, the very kind that caused the financial mess we're all currently experiencing.

That Mulroney and MacKay thought the west-first Reformers and the slash-and-cut Ontario Mike Harris-types would be a good thing has to go down as one of the greatest miscalculations in Canadian political history.

Scott Harradine
Barrie

CHAMBER LOSING VISION

(Re: “Chamber to keep an eye on

plans for train station” in the April 14 edition of the Examiner)

In response to this article and other public comments made by representatives of the Greater Barrie Chamber of Commerce, I feel that the chamber is further perpetuating the stereotype that city council has not been listening.

In fact, this has been one of the most inclusive processes I can remember and continues to be so through the next stage.

While I respect the chamber's right to disagree with council's decision, I am somewhat offended that the chamber is claiming overwhelming support for either proposal — when, in fact it had less than 100 respondents out of 1,200 members, or approximately eight per cent, of its membership indicate a preference either way.

I believe as a former director of the chamber (2003-2006) that it has a responsibility to be up front.

The chamber has hidden behind what it portrays as an outcry from its membership, and the facts clearly illustrate that is not the case.

The facts are that five per cent of its membership preferred the Fore-



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cast/Mark Porter proposal, not 66 per cent as has been reported.

The e-mail survey sent out by the chamber indicates as follows:

“After seeing both presentations, the board discussed the merits of each, and took a vote on which proposal the chamber should support. While noting that both presentations had promise, they decided to stand behind the Forecast proposal.

“Being your elected representatives, the board has the authority to make a decision like this on your behalf. As this is a project that will affect Barrie's waterfront for years to come, however, we are seeking your input to ensure that Barrie businesses have the opportunity to speak and be heard.”

The chamber board had made its decision long before it asked the opinion of its membership.

The chamber is a valuable organization, however, I fear these types of actions take them away from their vision statement: “To be the Leading Business Organization in Barrie.”

Coun. Michael Prowse
Ward 6, Barrie

E-POLL

This week's question:

Without an Ontario team to cheer for in the NHL playoffs, who will you be rooting for?

Montreal
Vancouver
Calgary
Other

Last week's question:

Do you think GO Transit should offer week-end train service from Barrie to Toronto?

Yes 95%
No 5%

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quote
of the day

We're a very small piece of the puzzle.

CAW boss Ken Lewenza reacts to news that Fiat chief executive Sergio Marchionne would walk away from the deal to buy Chrysler without major wage cuts to Chrysler's unionized workforce