

THE BARRIE EXAMINER

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comment

Plugged in on Internet issue

Recently, the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) attempted to change how carriers charge and cap Canadians Internet usage (Usage Based Billing — UBB).

Patrick Brown
PARLIAMENT HILL

Our government is deeply concerned over how this would impact consumers, small businesses, entrepreneurs, creators and innovators in our society.

I am pleased that the CRTC has followed our government's lead and initiated a review of its decision.

Within the framework of the Telecom Act, the first priority of the CRTC is to develop a telecommunication system that enriches and strengthens Canada's social and economic fabric. Their mandate is clear. The CRTC's decisions are supposed to render reliable, affordable and high-quality telecommunication services, as well as enhancing efficiency and competitiveness at national and international levels.

In my view, the CRTC's decision on UBB does none of the above. On the contrary, it virtually eliminates competition by further entrenching a duopoly, it dramatically increases the cost to the consumer and it weakens our social fabric by cutting down, or limiting how Canadians make use of the Internet.

In decades past, there were similar disputes over long distance rates. At the time, it cost about a dollar a minute to call Toronto from Barrie. Back then, many of the same players in today's debate objected to new competition being allowed in the game. The market was opened up and today the cost to consumers for the same phone call is just pennies. And in spite of the much better rates, the phone companies still make money.

Canadians are already paying significantly more for the Internet (unlimited bandwidth in Canada is up to 90 times more expensive than other countries) and with a worldwide ranking of 33rd for broadband Internet speeds, we are sadly lagging behind the rest of the world.

Speaking of the rest of the world, the BBC recently conducted a poll of more than 27,000 adults from 26 countries. More than three-quarters of people across the world believe access to the Internet is a fundamental right.

The CRTC sees the internet as a utility, like electricity, where people pay for what they consume. But the UBB model is flawed in that it asks the consumer to guess at usage, severely punishes you if you are over, and refuses to offer any adjustment if you are under the limit.

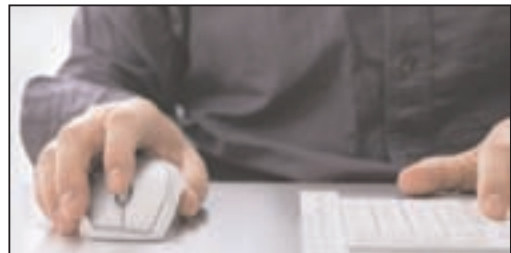
Your Conservative government has been active in trying to bring competition to the wireless industry. We encourage competition, an increase in consumer choice and appropriate regulation to allow market forces to prevail.

As our government develops Canada's first comprehensive Digital Economy Strategy, we need to look carefully at how decisions like these affect the bigger picture. We need to make sure government policies provide the right framework for entrepreneurs to flourish, for innovative new ideas to take root, and for real opportunity and job creation.

Regardless of the outcome of this review, our government will not tolerate a CRTC decision that caps Internet usage. The CRTC must reverse this decision and I look forward to their review of Usage Based Billing.

Patrick Brown is Barrie's MP

(The CRTC is an arms-length organization which operates independently from the government)

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GO ahead — name station already

It really shouldn't be this complicated to name a GO Transit station, or even two stations, in Barrie.

This week, a majority of city councillors decided not to use an Internet survey to pick names for the current GO stop, in the Mapleview Drive East and St. Paul's area, and the new one on the Allandale land.

As eager as this council seems to be to get public input on its decisions (the city election was just in October, so that feeling lingers a while), common sense said stay away from online polls.

Because as Coun. Barry Ward said, once you have a poll, people expect the result to mean something.

In other words, if the winning entries were 'Just Who The Heck Is St. Paul's GO Station' and 'The Mistake By The Lake GO Station', city council would have some responsibility to use those names.

When you ask citizens a question, you have to listen to the answer — even if the poll was hijacked by a special interest group or people who have no interest in finding proper names for these commuter train stations.

So it's probably better just not to ask at all. Find accept-

able names and attach them to the stations instead.

Barrie councillors, however, haven't done that. They've delayed a decision until March and they will ask citizens for suggestions.

But it's not a poll or a survey.

The case can certainly be made, however, that there's no real need to do even that. The 11 people on city council were all elected last fall by those interested enough in local politics to vote.

These are the type of decisions they were elected to make.

Except, that in politics, it often doesn't work that way. And anything to do with the Allandale rail land is especially sensitive.

This is the property, at Tiffin Street and Lakeshore Drive, which has sat virtually idle for decades, an eyesore near Kempenfelt Bay's shore (hence the 'Mistake By The Lake' reference).

When the previous council decided it should be re-developed along commercial/residential lines, with a new YMCA and the old train station restored as a museum/community centre etc., there were howls of protest.

Many residents didn't like

council's choice of developer and they didn't want the Y on the waterfront. They did want the train station restored.

The Y eventually backed out, for a number of reasons. The other elements of the development are going ahead.

But those councillors, some who were re-elected last fall, were accused of not listening to their constituents. Which is not true. Councillors listened and the majority decided to do something else.

New Mayor Jeff Lehman ran his campaign on a platform to open up city hall, to give residents more say in the decisions council makes, and he has kept his word.

There's now an 'open mike' segment at council meetings, where people or those representing groups can, within reason, stand up and say their piece.

It was probably in that spirit that naming Barrie's GO stations was to be the subject of an Internet survey.

Fortunately, that didn't fly. But residents can still weigh in. They can call or write or e-mail or text the city or their councillor or the mayor.

And when all is said and done, the stations should be named 'St. Paul's GO Station' and 'Allandale GO Station'.

Right-wingers aren't the scary ones

Enquete is a great French CBC-TV show that has an unbelievable team of researchers and usually offers an informative perspective on public affairs.

Unfortunately, as often happens with the Crown corporation, it betrays a leftist bias and demonizes the political right.



Eric Duhaime

Last week, *Enquete* journalist Brigitte Bureau tried to scare us with her report about the privileged access some evangelical Christians might have to Ottawa's inner circle of power.

Opposition to abortion and gay marriage are presented as proof of the progress made by some obscure religious leaders. The report implies a Conservative majority would re-criminalize the first and abolish the second, but it does not mention that a strong contingent of Conservative MPs are clearly opposed to going back to both issues.

The most troubling fact of the report is the choice made by the Bloc Quebecois to have Richard Nadeau, MP for Gatineau, lead their partisan attacks. Nadeau denounced the Tory government's unconditional support of Israel. He also accused Prime Minister Stephen Harper of receiving a prize in Jerusalem last March in recognition of his hard work in defence of the Jewish state.

Neither Nadeau nor Radio-Canada mentioned, however, that last Sept. 4 the Bloc MP received the 2010 El-Hidaya plaque of appreciation from the Montreal Muslim Community Center, a centre described by Canadian Muslim author Tarek Fatah as "a hotbed of pro-Hezbollah activities in Montreal." Hezbollah is classified as a terrorist organization by Canada.

Given his participation in a rally under the Hezbollah flag in August 2006, it is not surprising to see Bloc Leader Gilles Duceppe come back to that Radio-Canada story during his General Council last weekend while his party was officially reopening the door to a coalition with the Liberals and the NDP.

Duceppe attacked the alleged association of Conservatives and evangelists by saying, "This ideological bias of religious fundamentalists is dangerous in a society."

Where was Duceppe when his own MP, Meili Faillie, had to reimburse the Muslim Association of Canada \$6,000 for one of her trips to the United Arab Emirates. Very embarrassing for Faillie, who at the same time supported the help this association gave the Muslim Brothers to build a mosque in Montreal.

He probably does not remember, either, that in October 2008 former Bloc MP Marcel Lussier argued in favour of the abolition of the anti-terrorism law and the recognition of Hamas, another Islamic organization classified as terrorist.

Duceppe may also have forgotten his MP of Lebanese origins, Maria Mourani, who in February 2009 sent all Canadian parliamentarians an e-mail with links to videos praising terrorist groups like Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad and al-Aqsa Martyr's Brigade.

It flabbergasts me to see how ready Bloc MPs — and to an even greater extent federal Liberals — are to denounce people of Christian faith in the Conservative party and use them to scare those of us who do not believe in God by telling us how they do not share our values and have a social conservative agenda, while at the same time they are caving in to the most radical elements of the Islamists in the name of political correctness, Trudeau's multiculturalism or — less openly — a few thousand Muslim votes.

The real threat to the equality of women, gay rights and our fundamental Western values might not be the ones the publicly funded CBC is presenting us.

— Eric Duhaime is a freelance writer

“
quote
of the day

You people in Barrie really know where your raccoons are. People showed us, 'they're in this tree, or the babies are over there.'"

Filmmaker Susan Fleming, whose documentary *Raccoon Nation* airs Feb. 24 on CBC TV.

Understanding a democratic 'bugaboo'

Canada is embroiled in a slanted debate about political finance, deliberately framed by one party to its own advantage.

Hopefully, voters will seek a deeper understanding, for shallow decisions will diminish democracy.

The bugaboo is Canada's per-vote funding system, whereby each federal party receives \$2 annually for each vote earned in the election.

The Conservatives have their gun sights on this, hoping to kill it, effectively maiming other parties. That's because the Conservative party makes the most effective use of other public subsidies, ones it doesn't mention, or propose to kill.

Democracy costs money. Crafting effective policy, organ-

Erich Jacoby-Hawkins
ROOT ISSUES

izing and communicating with voters isn't free; without it, we can't have good platforms, or an informed vote.

Money must come from somewhere, and where it does determines the bias of political parties. Funding based on vote share encourages parties to seek greater public support. Private donations leave parties beholden to those with cash to spare for political causes — currently fewer than 2% of Canadians.

But make no mistake, those

'private donations' are also publicly funded, through tax rebates starting at 75%. So while some parties cater to the political wishes of their wealthy donors, your tax dollars pick up the tab.

We also have election rebates: candidates can get 60%, and parties 50%, of their election spending repaid. Available only to candidates with over 10% of the vote, or parties with over 2%, this favours established parties with deeper pockets.

Of these three subsidies, which do you think matter the most to the Conservatives, and which is proportionately their least important? If you guessed they benefit the most from tax and election rebates and least from per-vote, you guessed right.

Per-vote funding makes your vote more powerful, because

Should those with the most money have the most influence, or should every voter count equally?

even if it doesn't elect the MP of your choice, it supports the party that best represents you. By withholding your vote from a party, you withhold money, too.

Top pollster Nick Nanos believes if we eliminate this democratic funding, the result will be a two-party system, leaving us just centre-left and centre-right. Most Canadians believe there are more than two approaches; limiting choice is no way to fix our democratic deficit.

Do you prefer party funding and power determined by how much money political parties attract from rich private interests, or a fair system based on share of public support?

Should those with the most

money have the most influence, or should every voter count equally? Should parties be trying to attract more money, or more votes?

Cancelling all political subsidies will just tighten wealth's grip on the levers of power. If subsidies must go, it should be rebates to donors and candidates.

Fund parties fully and fairly based on how much voter support they earn, and preserve democratic choice.

Erich Jacoby-Hawkins is an educator, father, volunteer, and politician. Comment on this and other Root Issues at www.ErichtheGreen.ca.