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Hilda Caverly,

Publisher, General Manager and Director of Finance

Frank Augruso
Advertising and
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Greg Giddens
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Robin Williams
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Foreman

www.chroniclejournal.com

Taking aim at shot-leery Canadians

CANADA has raced ahead of the United States, edged passed the U.K. and has Israel — long the COVID vaccine envy of the world — firmly in its sights.

As this week started, some 60 per cent of Canadians had received at least one shot. That put us ahead of the U.S. at 51 per cent, Britain at 59 per cent, and closing in on Israel, which has stalled out at 63 per cent.

That's impressive and well worth celebrating, especially given the fits and starts of Canada's early vaccine rollout.

In the race to full vaccination those countries are still well ahead, as Canada is only now starting to accelerate second doses. But it shows that once vaccines are available, Canadians for the most part are keen to roll up their sleeves for a jab.

But the job is far from done. To make sure the third wave is our final wave, more Canadians need to get the jab. And reaching those who have yet to receive their first dose, despite months of encouragement, targeting and assistance, is a much harder job than signing up the willing and the eager.

In Toronto, for example, the vaccination rate for adults with at least one dose is some 71 per cent. That's good but it's not high enough to ensure herd immunity and bring an end to the pandemic, especially with the new more dangerous variants.

More than 30 per cent of those in the 50-54 age group, who have been eligible for vaccines for more than a month, still don't have one. In the 35-39 age group it's closer to 40 per cent. And more than a quarter of those over 80, who have been eligible the longest and are at the greatest risk, still haven't been vaccinated.

As the vaccine rollout across Canada moves on to accelerating second doses, more must be done to reach those first-dose stragglers.

The first step is ensuring that everyone has a genuine opportunity to say yes to a vaccine. That will take multiple approaches, from making it easier and more convenient to getting family doctors and trusted community members to talk to those who have concerns.

But once there are enough doses and easy access, the clock starts on the shift in tone from "please get your shot" to "you must get your shot."

It won't come in a mandatory legislation sort of way; this is Canada, after all, and politicians at all levels are falling all over themselves to assure Canadians that no one will be forced to get a shot. And there will always be exceptions for those who have legitimate reasons for not getting a shot. But the pressure to do the right thing will increase, as will the consequences for not being vaccinated.

That's already starting to happen.

Last week, the Ford government moved to require staff in Ontario's long-term-care homes to be fully vaccinated or provide medical proof of why they can't be inoculated or participate in "an educational program about the benefits of vaccination and the risks of not being vaccinated."

Along with a stick for the unvaccinated staff came a carrot for the vaccinated residents. Starting on Wednesday, those who are fully vaccinated can leave their care homes on day and overnight social outings.

Western and Trent universities have said students who want to live in campus residences must be vaccinated.

These kinds of carrots for the vaccinated and sticks for the stragglers or the outright unwilling are certain to increase in the coming weeks to push vaccine rates to the necessary higher levels.

A COVID vaccine isn't just a nice-to-have; it's the key to saving lives, getting hospitals back to normal operations, and letting businesses reopen and social life resume.

Getting a vaccine as soon as you're able to is not just what you do for yourself. It's a civic duty to protect others.

— An editorial from the *Toronto Star*

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Copenhagen focus on energy efficiency

OUR environmental solutions do not seriously address rising temperatures resulting from climate change. In fact, renewable energy sources only go halfway to tackling global warming. The other half is energy efficiency.

Like Europe, Canada's housing, retail and industry waste gigantic amounts of energy. So, when I read that the municipality of Copenhagen, Denmark planned to become the world's first CO2-neutral capital by 2025 I was speechless.

Over the course of 10 years, Copenhagen has committed to completely removing the city's two million tons of carbon footprint.

Copenhagen created Energy-Lab Nordhavn, which will be completed this year. The Danish smart-energy lighthouse project will integrate all relevant and

available energy forms in the city. They have demonstrated how they can turn energy waste into an immediate resource.

The project's activities are concentrated around Nordhavn, Copenhagen's newly revamped harbour neighborhood. This emerging district is designed to be the world's foremost smart-energy laboratory at full scale.

This district's heating and smart-grid integration shows how electricity and heat, energy-efficient buildings and electric transport can be integrated into one intelligent, flexible and optimized energy system.

Imagine what Canada or even the City of Thunder Bay could achieve by implanting an "EnergyLab" and Copenhagen's findings.

Karen Rooney
THUNDER BAY



An easy first step to inclusion

BY TAMMY DROMBOLIS

VERY often we don't know where to begin to make a change. Sometimes the change is thrust upon us.

At the age of 54, I received a memo for an up-and-coming job that reminded me to be sensitive about gender pronouns. I confess that I stared at the screen with abject puzzlement. I knew he and she were binary pronouns. What was I missing? Did it matter?

I did the only sensible thing a confused middle-aged lady (person) could do and consulted someone 20 years younger. As it turned out, it mattered. It matters. I, myself and others need to change our approach to the language to be inclusive to all Canadians.

The rules of English are structured without more than two gender pronouns. He and she are the only options. Anyone who falls outside of he and she cannot be addressed correctly. How can we include people with dignity and respect if the very core of our language does not have the correct words.

Canada recognizes gender fluidity, transgender, homosexuality, and other stages of gender, but the English language is still stuck with only he and she. How do we accommodate?

I personally have adopted the habit of not using gender pronouns. Instead of addressing a group with "Good evening ladies and gentlemen," I will simply say "Good evening." Instead of addressing a room of ladies as "Hello ladies," I will say something to the tune of "Hello medical professionals" or "Goodnight audience."



ONE CITY,
MANY VOICES

The Thunder Bay's Anti-Racism and Respect Committee and Diversity Thunder Bay produce this monthly column to promote greater understanding of race relations in Northwestern Ontario.

Simple change of words ensures all feel welcome

It does not solve the problem with rules of the English language, but it allows me to be inclusive — to make fewer mistakes.

You may not know that one person in that audience is gendered differently. By making a slight adjustment in your word choice, they will be included without drawing them out. It makes them part of the group instead of a group plus one. When we address that crowd, we see men and women. We can easily overlook that one person in our audience.

As binary heterosexuals, we have been conditioned to expect that the one who is different will be easily spotted. It would be the

tall hairy fella in a dress or that pretty-faced butch girl. In fact, those are stereotypes that are miles from the truth. There are other stages of gender that need to be considered.

There may be a transgender person sitting there. A person who was born a female and looks like a female but identifies herself as a man. There may be that transsexual lady who is in fact someone who was born a man but took hormones or had surgery to live their life as a female.

There may be a gender-fluid audience member, meaning that, yes, they were born as a male or female but in fact they feel that they belong to both genders.

The examples could go on, but this small sample should be enough to illustrate that we can make a slight change in our own thinking and word usage and be part of making a difference. In summary, by excluding the two words 'he' and 'she' from our word usage, we have included a whole host of other people who are part of our community and world.

It is inclusive. It is kind. It is easy. It's an attainable first step.

Tammy Drombolis, who goes by her maiden name Tingy Wende when presenting her art forms, is a soulful artist and a professional photographer. A resident of Thunder Bay, Tammy believes in minimal narratives and prefers to let her work speak for who she is (visit: tingy-wende.pixels.com). She believes that they say it better than a pile of words. The views and opinions expressed in this column are those of the author.

Teacher compensation too high

BY JAY GOLDBERG

WHILE thousands of Ontario teachers are receiving six-figure salaries, a budget crunch at the Ministry of Education means it's time to bring their sky-high pay down to earth.

A report released by the Ontario Financial Accountability Office shows a \$200 million funding gap between what the province has budgeted to spend on education and what actual costs will be for this fiscal year.

That gap will widen to \$2.9 billion by 2029-30. And the 2021 Ontario budget has already committed the province to increase education spending by an average of \$356 million per year over the next decade.

Even though the Ford government is increasing its already bloated budget, the opposition parties are demanding even higher spending.

A Liberal government would spend an additional \$12.3 billion to meet the funding gap and add an extra \$8 billion over the next five years, announced leader Steven Del Duca.

"Ford is shortchanging our children's future," said Del Duca.

Far from shortchanging students, Ontario is also already the biggest spender in the country on education. Ontario spends an average of \$17,000 per student each year, while other large provinces like British Columbia and Quebec



COMMENTARY

spend \$9,600 and \$12,300, respectively. If Ontario spent as much money per student as British Columbia, Ontario would save about \$5.4 billion per year.

Billions of dollars in new spending cannot be the answer to every policy problem. Ontario currently has the highest subnational debt in the entire world, having passed the \$400 billion mark earlier this year.

With a \$33.1 billion deficit and no plan to balance the budget until at least 2029, Ontario should look to find savings elsewhere within the education budget rather than pursue an even bigger increase in spending.

Over 71 per cent of Ontario's education budget goes toward paying teachers and education bureaucrats, meaning taxpayers are already spending \$22 billion on salary and benefits this year.

A five per cent across-the-board pay reduction would eliminate the funding gap.

Many workers outside of government who were fortunate enough to keep their jobs have tak-

en major pay cuts during the economic downturn. By contrast, union agreements ensure that all full-time teachers have been receiving annual raises.

In Ontario, 23 per cent of teachers are making over \$100,000 per year. The number of teachers making six-figure salaries doubled last year, reaching a total of nearly 30,000.

Those numbers don't even factor in the generous benefits and gold-plated pensions the government gives teachers, never mind the fact that teachers work 74 per cent of workdays each calendar year.

With hundreds of thousands of Ontarians still out of work and pandemic job losses overwhelmingly concentrated in the private sector, it's time for teachers to share in the burden.

Asking teachers to take a five per cent pay cut is more than reasonable. Many in the private sector have endured far worse.

To address the funding gap, Ford should ask teachers to live in the real world with the rest of us, help shoulder the burden and take a pay cut.

Jay Goldberg is the interim Ontario director for the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, an independent citizens' advocacy group fighting for lower taxes, less waste and more accountable government. Column courtesy www.troymedia.com.

Diversity of views

We take pride in our letters section as a forum for sharing diverse views. We know there are a wide range of opinions on a variety of topics and believe strongly that our community is best served when all opinions are exposed, considered and discussed.

Letters kept to 300 words have priority and may be edited for space, style, accuracy and clarity. Letters must be the original work of the author and be exclusive to The Chronicle-Journal. Please cite page and date for articles mentioned. Letters may appear on our website. There is no restriction on the frequency of letters.

E-mail (no attachments): letters@chroniclejournal.com

Fax: 343-9409

Mail: Letters, 75 S. Cumberland St., Thunder Bay ON P7B 1A3

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