

OPINION



LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

DEMOCRACY REQUIRES OPEN & TRANSPARENT COMMUNICATION
BY CO-PUBLISHER KAITLYN CLARK

On June 2, Ontario will see democracy in action as individual regions vote in their Members of Provincial Parliament and, once tallied, we see who will lead our province for the next four years. At times like these, we also need to question how well that democracy is working.

I believe voting is important. It's the first step a citizen can take to help shape their home and future. While there are arguably some shortcomings in the style of our elections and a debate could be had as to changes that could best serve the people, the current system is at least workable.

If people participate, that is.

Every election there is a discussion on voter turnout and, much like with organ donation, I believe that mandating participation unless someone specifically opts out would go a long way to encouraging better numbers.

But even before the vote, the first step to any election is the campaign period. This time allows for candidates to reach out to potential constituents and share their platforms. As much as increasing the quantity of voters is important, I believe it's equally important to better the quality of those votes. When voters are well informed, it betters our communities. It means they get vocal about what really matters to them, and that means politicians are forced to listen and are pressured to make things better.

This is one of the reasons I'm most proud to be a part of this newspaper. We have the privilege to share information about our local candidates and what they stand for. We have the privilege to be trusted by our readers to help inform them of their options. It's a privilege we don't take lightly.

For these reasons, I have growing concerns as we head into this year's provincial election. These concerns began with the last federal election, as current MP Leslyn Lewis went uncontested in the initial bid to be the Conservative candidate. While I won't get into the drama that ensued around other interested people failing to get on the ballot, it has always been clear that Lewis had the support of the Federal Conservative party and was being placed in Haldimand with that support. That isn't to say she can't serve the people of Haldimand Norfolk well; I'll leave it to each of you reading this to decide your feelings on Lewis' work now that she has the seat.

Now forward to the Provincial election, and we see a similar scene unfold. This time however, there isn't even a hint of an election among the parties. Following current MPP Toby Barrett's retirement, our current mayor, Ken Hewitt, was appointed by Premier Doug Ford himself to take the candidacy. Additionally, the local Liberal agency had local candidates they supported, but the Provincial party chose who they wanted for the party. Again, this isn't to say these appointed candidates can't serve our community well if elected, but rather that it is concerning this step of our democracy has been passed over. While I welcome newcomers to Haldimand, I am concerned that such important positions could potentially be filled by people who have no interest in the riding outside of the job title.

This concern for the state of our democracy has only been heightened by the communication style, or rather lack thereof, extending from the PC party since the announcement of Hewitt's running. As readers will have noticed, The Press has been running a series of profiles of each of the candidates as they've announced running and as we've been able to connect with the candidate for an interview. Readers will notice, however, that some candidates have not been profiled by next week's paper (our final edition before election day). It appears likely that Hewitt will be among this group, as we were told by a PC party rep following our initial request for an interview that Hewitt would be unable to accommodate answering the questions. We were also informed he would be unable to attend our candidate debate this week, and we heard from the Simcoe Chamber of Commerce's debate organizers that they received the same message.

This led me to take a dive into Hewitt's online campaign presence to see his digital reach. I found a Facebook page with 11 followers (as of publication) and a website. The website does include an overview of Hewitt's history, but the only platform points come from a shortened release originally published on the PC party's site, along with a couple PC party releases criticizing Liberal leader Steven Del Duca and an announcement on a new hospital for Windsor-Essex.

Perhaps Hewitt has done all of his campaigning door to door, but if this is the case I have yet to see him or any promotional material at my home. And even if I had, my concern remains for how many people will be missing his messaging and stance when avenues like local newspapers are ignored, despite being a primary news source for many voters.

Hewitt may not be the only candidate to end up on the ballot without having reached out to the newspaper. Their lack of communication concerns me as well, but Hewitt is of particular concern for two reasons. The first is that he is the candidate for the party that has had our region's support for nearly three decades, so I would expect a greater enthusiasm to engage with voters on wider scale. The second reason is that we as a newspaper have previously never had a problem regularly communicating with Hewitt as the mayor, but now this communication has come to an abrupt halt for MPP candidate matters. I have heard this strategy is being implemented elsewhere in the province, with other PC candidates avoiding candidate debates and similar public speaking engagements. I worry about what this says when political parties actively avoid having their candidates speak publicly during a campaign.

We rely on transparent communication from our sources when writing articles and informing the public on current happenings to ensure a complete and accurate story. Barrett went above and beyond in this partnership, providing weekly opinion columns and regular press releases for provincial matters that specifically affect Haldimand and Norfolk, along with responding to requests for further information. We greatly appreciated those efforts and come June 2 – regardless of who the vote supports – we hope to see a similarly strong partnership with our new MPP moving forward.

Letters to the Editors and Creative Corners can be emailed to publishers@haldimandpress.com. Letters should be within 300 words. Publication is not guaranteed and The Press reserves the right to edit for grammar, length, clarity, and accuracy.

Letters to the Editors

Kids should never be near lawn mowers!

To the Editors,

Accidents can happen in the blink of an eye. When I was four years old, I was playing outside when I slipped on the grass and fell underneath a riding lawn mower. I lost my left leg below the knee.

I grew up in The War Amps Child Amputee (CHAMP) Program, and today, I help pass on the Association's PLAYSAFE message. With lawn cutting season here, I want

every kid across the country to know they should never be around lawn mowers.

I accept who I am today, but I wouldn't want anyone else to go through what I did. I hope that by sharing my story, it will prevent even just one child from being injured.

If you would like to learn more about how to play safely and hear stories from other young amputees like me who have lost limbs in accidents, visit waramps.ca/playsafe.
Zoe Gottwald, 16

Future of Nanticoke lands

To the Editors,

After reading recent press coverage on the importance of the Nanticoke development to this election, I agree with MPP Toby Barrett's assessment that allowing Empire Communities to build 15,000 homes for 40,000 residents out by Stelco and Esso refinery is not a good idea.

Don't get me wrong. We desperately need new homes built. There are so many people who need a place to live. Haldimand is a great place to be. There is a growing list of people needing an affordable place to go and call home. But to build these homes right beside Stelco and the Esso refinery is wrong for a number of reasons.

First, the people who need affordable homes will not be able to afford anything that Empire Communities builds. They will not be able to pay for the mortgages. They will not be able to afford the gas to get around out there, to go shopping, to the doctors, to work – all the basic movements required to just have a normal lifestyle.

Second, putting these homes out into the Nanticoke business area is also going to create all kinds of problems for these great companies. They do all they can to keep the air pollution down. However, anybody who has gone out there to swim at the beach by Oneida Baptist Camp, or just fish in the many streams out in this area, knows if the winds blow the wrong way that a very unpleasant aroma will come from these companies.

Third, is it not time for Haldimand County to start thinking about climate change

and what we can do to help to slow down the pollution created by the cars we drive? Remember 15,000 homes will mean at least 15,000 further cars. More likely that will be 30,000 vehicles. We have no mass transit anywhere in Haldimand, so the residents will need a way of getting around. There is no shopping, entertainment, or schools in Nanticoke. There are almost no amenities out in the area. Most are about an hour drive away in one direction. That would be a lot of gas used and pollution created and for what? Because there was just cheap land for Empire Communities to build their homes and maximize their profits.

Fourth, how about the congestion on these two-lane roads that 30,000 vehicles would create? The farmers have enough problems dealing with traffic now. Can Haldimand afford to build all the infrastructure needed to help move these vehicles in and around Haldimand?

Fifth, I believe that Stelco did not buy up the land around them in hopes of the companies that would move out there and would help to service their needs or use their product and create other products.

All in all I believe building 15,000 homes out in the Nanticoke area around Stelco and Esso is a great idea for Empire Communities, not a good idea for Haldimand County or the people who already live here. Building in Nanticoke makes less sense than when the Provincial Government created Townsend.

Patrick Cook,
Hagersville

Creative CORNER

Do you have something creative to submit? Send it to publishers@haldimandpress.com. Submissions can be a poem, a photo of physical artwork, a short story, photography, etc. Send your name and town of residence with submission. Publication is not guaranteed.

The Search by Constance e Bryce, Riverside Writer

Shining through a dark cold night
Struggling through the frost
I can't sleep
Or even rest
Knowing you are out there
Somewhere
And I'm searching
Frantically
Trying to catch the morning sun
And not burn up
I'm trying to shade my tired eyes

Enough to see
And follow you
But you're gone somewhere
I can't go...

Observation is hampered by emotion
Emotion threatens my heart
My heart is way too anxious
Anxiety prevents me
From connecting in the dark
And I'm still searching.

This week's little gem

Did you hear about the mathematician who's afraid of negative numbers?

He'll stop at nothing to avoid them.