

THE RECORD



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# Wilfully blind to traffic woes

It's no fun trying to get around Cambridge these days, especially if you are a motorist. Highway 24 — effectively the city's main street and its primary north-south roadway — is being torn up for widening from Dunbar Road south toward the Delta intersection.

The road crews aren't working on nights or weekends. The work is being done Monday to Friday, during prime business hours, at a point where traffic congestion — and driver tempers — are at their worst.

That's the area of Cambridge closest to the Delta intersection, where Highway 24 meets Dundas and Coronation Boulevard. That's also where the multi-car Canadian Pacific Railway shuttle trains cross a few times each day, effectively bisecting the city into east-west sectors and choking traffic flow in the process.

Lengthy wait times and traffic backups of more than a kilometre each way are common — and the Highway 24 construction is making it worse. A true emergency, such as a traffic-accident injury or heart attack requiring immediate hospitalization, would be very difficult to deal with when the city is split in two and when traffic is forced to a virtual standstill.

All of this is a simple fact of driving life in Cambridge. It's been this way for years — and there were no particular surprises in a SmartCity poll in The Record Saturday that suggested that a full 22 per cent of the city's residents believe that transportation bottlenecks are the community's single most important issue.

Nothing else came even remotely close. Eleven per cent said health care is the primary concern; 10 per cent cited rapid population growth; another eight per cent cited water quality.

Two things have become crystal-clear to drivers in Cambridge and across the entirety of traffic-stalled Waterloo Region: The first is that the \$281 million being spent this year among the region and its seven member municipalities is money that simply has to be put to use. Our roads network is inadequate; it has not kept up with the pressures of population and commercial growth.

The second point of clarity constitutes an indictment of the local political and planning process. The growth spurt across Waterloo Region that was brought about by the arrival of Toyota, and then its spinoffs, and then the tech boom, has been with us — and readily apparent — for nearly two decades. Local transportation policy has not kept pace with economic growth and for that, our politicians and planners must accept the blame.

It all boils down to this: The taxpaying citizens of Waterloo Region have been let down. They deserve more and better for their money, especially so in a highly successful, rapidly urbanizing community that forecasters and analysts have properly identified as one of Canada's top economic growth engines.

On transportation issues, our local policy-makers have been short-sighted in the extreme. The roadway improvements that have been made have been patchwork, piecemeal and sorely lacking in vision, scope and genuine sense of need. Across Waterloo Region and in Cambridge, particularly, we have reacted to growth — we have not planned for it — and drivers are paying the price.

# Safe, speedy passage

A government's primary responsibility is the safety and well-being of its own citizens. In the United States, particularly since the horror of 9/11, that responsibility is taken very, very seriously, as Canadians well know.

Effective Jan. 1, 2008, visitors entering the U.S. will need either a passport or a new border-crossing card. Failure to produce will mean denial of entry — and some Canadians are concerned that the new American border policy could be overly restrictive, and perhaps impose unfair limitations. The objectors see the Canada-U.S. border, heralded as the longest undefended national border on the planet, potentially jeopardized by fear of a 9/11 sequel.

U.S. President George W. Bush put those fears at least partly to rest over the weekend when he suggested that whatever form those border cards might take, they would not impose hardship and would have to be acceptable to both Washington and Ottawa.

"We're working with your government to make certain that the identification cards that will be used between our two borders are compatible not only with our needs, but your needs, too," Bush said. "We're working . . . to make sure that whatever documents are needed will not be restrictive."

That's the proper response. What's needed beyond that is to ensure safe, speedy passage for legitimate cross-border travellers. Our economies — particularly Canada's — depend on that.

LETTER OF THE DAY

## We'd be better off keeping track of criminals

The fundamental premise in the May 17 Record editorial, Keep And Reform The Gun Registry, concerning what the gun registry can accomplish is flawed.

The question asked was "What is wrong with a government agency that has a list of people who own potentially dangerous weapons?" The answer is simple — every physical object found anywhere is a potentially dangerous weapon: knives, bats, cars, clubs, bricks, table legs, lamps, letter openers, screwdrivers, hammers, chainsaws, machetes, golf clubs, etc. The editorial's fundamental flaw is trying to track the tool. The tool is not the problem — the user is.

Of the seven million to 16 million firearms in Canada, how many will be used in a crime? Perhaps 200? That means you keep track of seven million objects, 99.997 per cent of which will do no harm. Isn't it more efficient instead to keep track of violent sociopathic criminals who have been identi-

fied by the courts for previous violent behaviour?

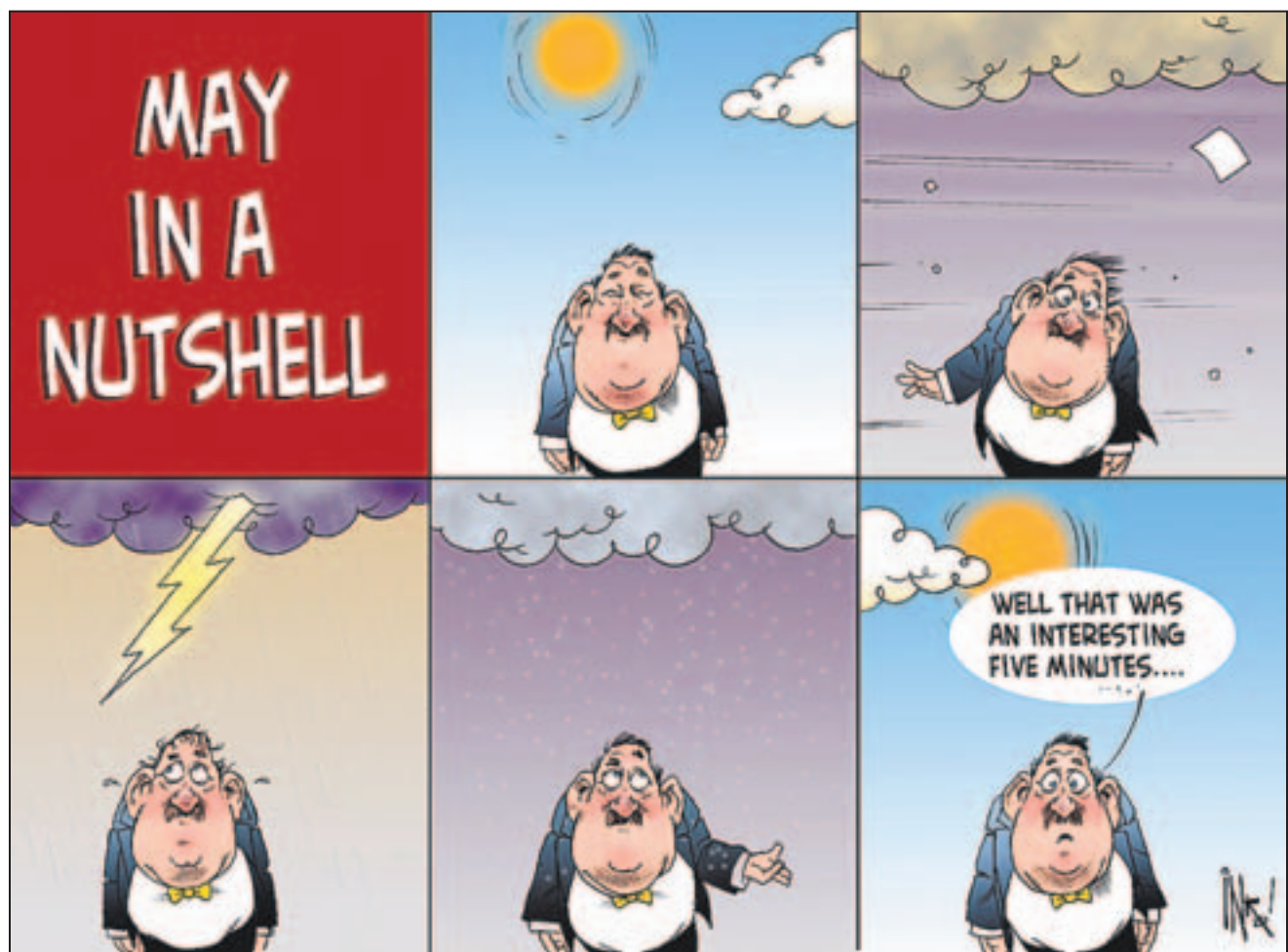
Perhaps The Record would also be in favour of warrantless searches of people on the street, in their cars, and in their homes, because if they have nothing to hide, the intrusion should be worth a police officer's life, right?

The other failure is to understand what the registry cannot do. It cannot tell police if there is an unregistered gun at the home of an unlicensed individual because it is not on the system. The police criminal database can tell them that a particular home is the residence of a convicted criminal with numerous weapons and drug offences, and a weapons prohibition.

Which information do you think the officer will use to modify his actions?

Repeat after me: Gun violence is not about guns, it's about violence.

• Tom McAuley, Winnipeg



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Energy audits essential

Regarding the May 13 story, Ottawa To End Energy-Use Tests In Area Homes, we share the federal government's concerns about accountability and cost-effectiveness. The EnerGuide for Houses program — a national network of empowerment on climate change — has scored well on both counts.

Contrary to some reports, administration costs for the EnerGuide for Houses program are low. In 2005-06, administration accounted for less than 12 per cent of the total federal money spent on this program. A full 88 per cent of the money went directly to homeowner benefits, either through incentive grants (54 per cent) or cost-sharing for house evaluations (34 per cent).

Some politicians are referring to the EnerGuide for Houses evaluations as "administration." This is an unusual way to refer to science-based professional energy audits. The evaluations motivate homeowners, identify the cost-effective energy savings, guide the retrofit work, and measure and verify the results. Getting rid of the audits, which seems to be the government's plan, would leave the program open to fraud and waste.

Energy audits are an essential part of a responsible, accountable, cost-effective home energy efficiency program that focuses on results.

• Mary Jane Patterson  
Manager, Residential Energy Efficiency Project, Waterloo Region

### Don't dictate to smokers

With the next step of the provincial bylaw against smoking being enforced soon — no smoking in legions and trucking vehicles — I have a few suggestions for new bylaws.

Maybe we should ban all vehicles. They cause emissions — poor air quality

and the drivers cause accidents, which in turn cause injury and death.

The next step would be to outlaw all fast-food outlets and snack-food companies. These cause health hazards such as obesity, heart disease, diabetes and a myriad of other problems.

If we ban everything that increases health costs, there would be little for our health professionals to do.

By banning these things we should have no taxes and no need for politicians making choices for individuals who have brains of their own. Let us make our own choices. No one should be dictated to.

"True north strong and free." What a joke.

• Yvette Cybulskie  
Waterloo

### Our future is nuclear

Regarding Don Ewing's May 2 letter, Phase Out Nuclear Power, there are many opinions about what should be learned from the Chernobyl accident.

The important lesson from Chernobyl can be paraphrased as: "It's a very bad idea to test your seatbelts by cutting most of the way through them and then slamming your car into a tree at 120 miles an hour."

Staying with the car analogy, Ewing suggests that because somebody did this 20 years ago, we must all stop driving cars because "there is still no guar-

antee that accidents won't happen."

While the severity of the Chernobyl accident was impacted by technical issues with the reactor design, the root causes of the accident were cultural and political.

Nuclear power is safe, reliable, economical, environmentally sound and part of the balanced energy mix that will power Ontario into the future.

• Brent Williams  
Kincardine

### I vote for Berlin

An amalgamated area should be called Berlin. Let's get back to the area's true roots.

• Jack Coutts  
Waterloo

### Article is encouraging

I appreciate Mirko Petricevic's May 13 article, Doing The Work Of God, about the Da Vinci Code and the simple story on Opus Dei. It is nice to hear that people can love God and also be down to Earth.

I can't believe it's an easy job raising a large family on one salary. But it sounds as though the John Helmer family is testimony that love of God and a large family can go hand in hand.

Hooray for taking on the challenges of a big family.

• Elise Adolph  
Toronto

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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# To keep Canada safe, we must keep track of firearms

Effective controls on firearms play an important role in preventing intentional and unintentional violence, death and injury. Every year, more than 800 Canadians are killed and more than 1,000 are injured by gunshots, whether in suicides, homicides or unintentional accidents.



SECOND OPINION  
DR. NEIL ARYA

Growing up in rural Ontario, I personally know how lethal guns can be. In Grade 4, one of my classmates was accidentally killed by his seven-year-old brother in their barn with an improperly stored family shotgun.

Another childhood friend, just married and in his early 20s, was killed by a friend in a hunting accident. Tragically, I have had two friends, who have taken their own lives in countries with far easier access to arms, Switzerland and the U.S. Guns have a far higher completion rate for suicide than other methods and are the treatment of choice for depression in some countries.

Registration is designed to make gun owners be accountable for their firearms. Licensing ensures that guns are kept away from those who pose a threat to themselves or others. The Firearms Act's mental-health back-

ground checks are meant to decrease murders by people with mental illness.

I sympathize with those who do not approve of or seek government interference into their chosen lifestyle. But freedom comes with responsibility and a balance must be struck between civil liberties and the right to live in safety, which the Firearms Act provides.

Studies have shown that women have a greater sense of freedom in environments without arms. Seatbelts are mandated as accidents cost our public health system billions. Waterloo Region was a leader developing smoking bylaws in public places in the name of public health. Why should firearms be treated differently?

Does the legislation protect people? Arguments used by the gun lobby suggest that most guns used in crime are stolen, that cross-border flow of arms makes legislation ineffective, and that the decrease in violent crime and the firearms death rate in the last two decades is not related to legislation.

Opponents of legislation think that training in safe storage and use of firearms, severe punishment for crimes with guns and, in the U.S., the right to carry concealed weapons actually reduces violence. The experience of our neighbours to the south does not appear to back these assertions.

The Canadian Association of Police Chiefs believes that tracking existing weapons allows better tracing, promotes responsibility and saves lives.

Obviously, there have been problems with the management of the firearms-registry program in the past, but the recent report by Auditor General Sheila Fraser confirmed that the system is now well managed.

Before Public Safety Minister Stockwell Day moves ahead with his proposition to gut the program by stealth, I suggest he research whether

his plan will actually save money.

Direct medical costs of small arms injury have been calculated as \$4 billion of a total societal cost of injury, disability and death of \$100 billion per year. In Canada, the total societal cost is about \$6 billion per year.

Minister Day wants to save \$10 million annually by not enforcing the legislation, but his promise to waive the \$60 fee for licence renewal of Canada's two million licensed gun owners will actually cost taxpayers \$120 million.

Who should bear the costs of licensing? Canadians pay for licences for the privileges of such activities as driving or even for fishing. Ontario adds a victim-restitution fee to its speeding tickets though only a small minority of people who speed cause accidents.

Why should guns be any different? One of my good friends, an Alberta physician and a hunter, sees the cost of registration as his civic duty, a small price to pay for the good of society.

Physicians see firsthand the devastating physical, psychological and social costs of firearms to individuals and families. Doctors are trained to evaluate risks and benefits of interven-

tions for patients. We can look at lung cancer as a tragedy or freak of nature or act in ways that are proven to reduce its risk. We know that there is a correlation between the number of firearms available and the firearms death rate in countries throughout the world.

As we seek to improve public safety, let us not throw out the baby with the bathwater. I have spoken before the UN General Assembly and written in various medical texts and journals about the damage of small arms.

The Canadian Public Health Association, Physicians for Global Survival, the Canadian Association of Emergency Physicians, the Trauma Association of Canada, the Suicide Prevention Centre, the National Association of Emergency Nurses, the Canadian Pediatric Society, and the Canadian Association for Adolescent Health all support our Firearms Act. Let us not adopt the ways of our southern neighbour; let us keep our country safe.

• Dr. Neil Arya is a Waterloo physician. Second Opinion columns express the views of Record readers on a variety of subjects.