

OPINION

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An open letter to the minister

Earlier this month, Human Services Minister Manmeet Bhullar invited us to the Alberta legislature to discuss the province's publication ban regarding children in care. During this discussion, he asked for our input on this legislation, what might be done to amend it, and why. Here is our reply.

Dear Minister:

We thank you for asking for our thoughts on the province's ban on publishing the identities of children in care.

Following our joint Fatal Care investigation last fall, you took over one of the government's most complex and challenging portfolios, and we applaud your efforts to date in lifting some of the veil of secrecy within the system.

We believe that the government has a right and a responsibility to protect the children in its care.

We respect in principle existing laws such as those regarding young offenders. But we also believe that Albertans deserve a more accountable, more transparent child death-review system.

As the spring session nears, we urge your government to lift its publication ban on children who have died in care, or who have died following prior contact with the ministry.

Our current legislation does not allow grieving families to speak their child's name in public, or show their photos. They must fight the government in court for that right.

Our child advocate is also bound by this law, resorting to death reviews with pseudonyms, initials, carefully obscured facts. An Alberta judge has called it "dehumanizing."

We urge you to amend this legislation so that — as in the majority of provinces of this nation — anyone who suffers the loss of a child has the right to make the public aware of what has happened.

Why is this so important?

Because Alberta's children should not be dying faceless and nameless.

Because it counters the groundless stigma and shame unfairly cast upon those within our child-welfare system.

Because — most critically — publication bans shroud the truth, and shelter the system from public scrutiny. Society must learn from its mistakes, and do all it can to prevent future deaths.

The law was supposed to be there to protect children in care, but for children who have died, that protection only stifles caregivers, families and authorities, and ultimately hampers investigations.

We urge you to restore to those children the only power they have left: Their stories.

Respectfully, the editorial boards of the Edmonton Journal and the Calgary Herald

Save the monarchs

From the Calgary Herald:

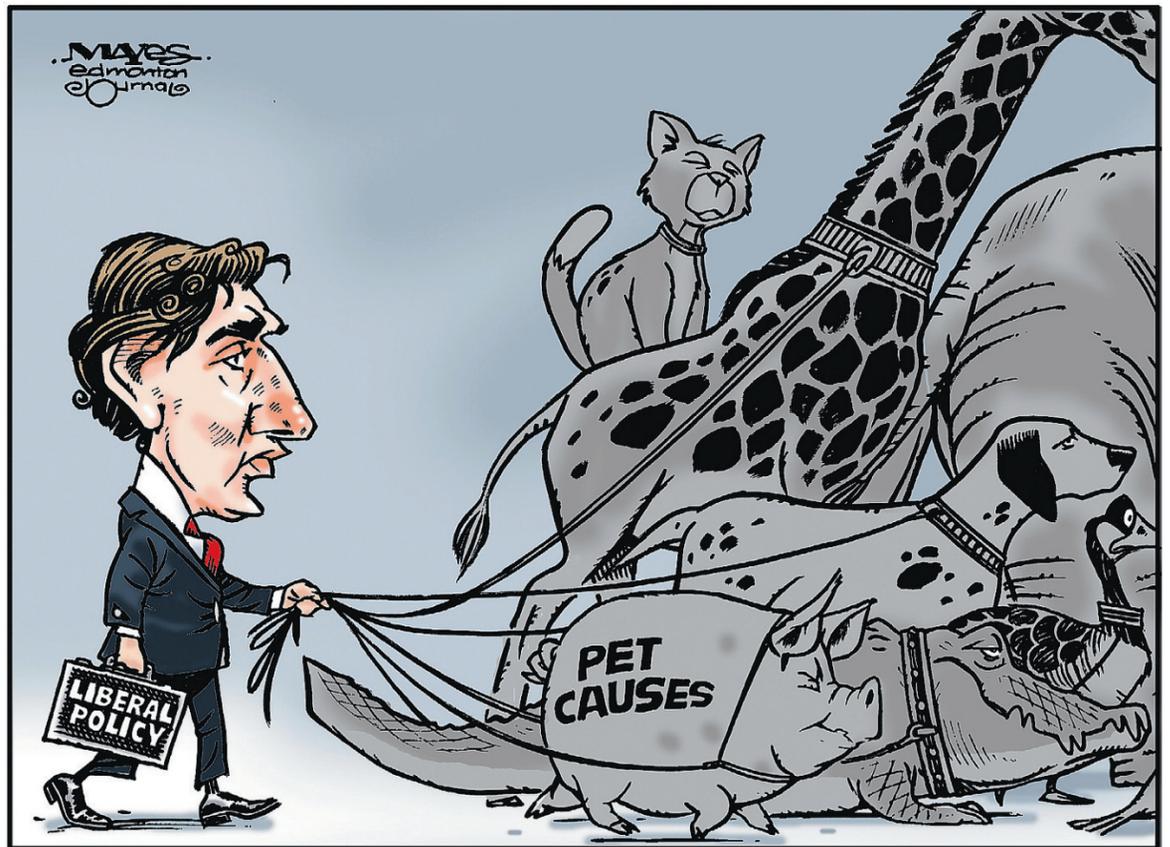
If the only thing that comes out of the recent Three Amigos Summit is the monarch butterfly is saved, then the meeting will have been a success.

Obviously, there were many weighty issues on the agenda for U.S. President Barack Obama, Prime Minister Stephen Harper and Mexican President Enrique Peña in Mexico City.

But the three leaders were also asked to help the delicate insect by protecting its food source along its winter migratory routes. Scientists, environmentalists, writers and artists have penned an open letter asking the three amigos to create a corridor of milkweed — the butterfly's food source — in an effort to slow the decline in the monarch butterfly's population.

The leaders agreed to establishing a working group to ensure the conservation of the monarch, "a species that symbolizes our association."

The initiative could include educating farmers and loggers to leave swaths of milkweed to continue to grow like a weed, rather than battling it or crushing it through logging practices.



LETTERS

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Games bust hockey myths

Re: "Closer than ever to the top," Feb. 24.

Myth: Fighting is an essential part of hockey.

Canada watched three full hockey games on the weekend, featuring the cream of the NHL playing for Olympic medals.

No goons, no enforcers, no blindsides hits, no gratuitous boarding, and definitely no fights. Just period after period of superb hockey.

Myth: Busted.

Alan Ball, Edmonton

Would a genius be silenced?

During the Sochi Olympics, Russia often played the music of Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky.

If the composer were alive today, Russia would imprison him under its anti-gay laws. That would mean no more performances of The Nutcracker, Swan Lake, Sleeping Beauty, the 1812 Overture, and Romeo and Juliet, among others.

Randy B. Williams, St. Albert

Great athletes show the way

The Winter Games have concluded in Sochi, Russia, after dazzling the world for two weeks.

From the opening to closing ceremonies, the spectacle was lavish, artistic, expertly executed, exciting, safe and absolutely everything the Olympics should be.

The Games highlighted the wonderful enthusiasm, skills and athleticism of the finest athletes from each country. I wonder how different the world would be if these fine people could be recruited to lend their enthusiasm and honesty to solving the terrible tragedies politicians have wrought on this tired planet.

To those leaders who petulantly chose to stay home, I hope they realize they were not missed at all.

And to the Western media that labelled them "Putin's Games," somehow implying he was forcing the event on his people, I hope they'll continue to call them that so he can wear the label as a badge of honour for himself and his people.

Sam ElBadrawy, Edmonton

Chief explains police actions

Re: "Calling justice into question," by Paula Simons, Commentary, Feb. 22.

In April 2012, the Edmonton Police Service (EPS) wrongly released personal information about an underage individual as part of an initiative to address outstanding warrants.

We immediately informed the Alberta Director of Law Enforcement, who returned the investigation to the EPS. However, instead of investigating ourselves, the EPS formally requested the RCMP to do an independent criminal investigation. The RCMP provided their results to Alberta Justice, which did not recommend criminal charges.

The EPS made a serious error and for that we alone are totally responsible. We screwed up. I again apologize.

The Journal's assertion that the EPS ignores laws "they don't happen to like" or that "the real victim was the rule of law" is completely contrary to the facts. While it is critical for the police to fact-check, it is equally important for journalists to do so.

Rod Knecht, chief of police, Edmonton

You don't rush good policies

Re: "Liberal reinvention appears to be in disarray," by Andrew Coyne, Ideas, Feb. 22.

I am sorry Andrew Coyne finds bottom-up, grassroots

democracy a little messy.

Developing policy takes time and effort. This method, however, is much preferred to the top-down approach we get from Stephen Harper's leadership.

The next federal election is at least a year away, so there is lots of time for discussion. A solid structure begins with a strong foundation.

That the Liberals appear to Coyne as being too far left of centre-right is only natural when you view things from the far right.

Dave Jobson, Edmonton

Taxing our drugs of choice

Recent big drug busts by police bring two points to mind.

First, there must be huge demand for these drugs. Second, either we have laws that do not reflect what society wants or we have a province full of criminals who belong in jail. We could build more prisons, as in the U.S., or we could update our laws.

We now allow alcohol, tobacco, coffee and tea, which all are addictive. Maybe we could add a few more drugs to the list of acceptable creators of tax cash. Or we could put our heads in the sand and pretend everything is OK. Has that political solution worked well?

My drugs of choice are alcohol and coffee, which I pay taxes on when I buy them. I want others to pay their fair share of taxes on their drugs of choice. That way, the playing field will be levelled.

Louis Cass, Edmonton

Health care's alarming path

Re: "Shortage of doctors leaves Slave Lake moms scrambling," by Nicola Ramsey, Letters, Feb. 14.

Albertans should be alarmed about where health care is heading.

Slave Lake residents are concerned about a shortage of

doctors after four physicians resigned from the town's family care clinic. I think the government and Alberta Health Services would happily replace these doctors with nurse practitioners, physician assistants and pharmacists.

That's the direction publicly funded health care in Alberta is heading. Registered nurses are being replaced by licensed practical nurses in every setting, and LPNs are being replaced by nursing aides.

I'm not OK with this. I want to see a doctor when I'm ill, and not be triaged by someone with less training. Unfortunately, I believe there will soon be a market for a two-tiered system in which people can see a physician if they're covered by private health care insurance.

Although I've always supported medicare, I'd consider opting for a private plan, which would allow me access to physicians rather than primary health-care providers with less training.

Dave Halbach, Edmonton

Parking fees add to stress

Re: "Give patients parking permits," by C. Price, Letters, Feb. 4.

My family has been challenged by several health issues this past year and has made many visits to emergency wards and cancer clinics.

These visits are stressful enough, but to add insult to injury we've spent more than \$1,000 in parking fees.

Families who have suffering loved ones should get support in their time of need, not be held hostage to high parking rates. It is appalling.

People should write to Alberta Health Services and demand a review of parking.

Nan Gilchrist, Edmonton

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