

LETTERS

Thanks to the teachers

The spokesperson for the Canadian Taxpayers Federation says the elephant in the room driving education costs is teacher pay. Pachyderm idioms aside, the author never suggests what is fair compensation for a minimum of five years post-secondary education for one of the most scrutinized and stressful occupations in Ontario. What is evident, however, is his ability to make a literate argument. For that, he can thank an overpaid teacher.
Phil Beard, Dundas

I don't get Hamilton

I don't get the people in Hamilton. Everybody complains about the "tent cities" popping up, but as soon as someone comes up with a solution, in this case "tiny homes," the locals cry "not in my backyard!" The problem is no matter where these homes are built, some will say "not here." So instead of complaining, maybe those people should be trying to help them get jobs so homeless people can feed themselves and actually rent a place to live. So stop the complaining and try helping.
Mike Lacroix, Hamilton

Twisted priorities

The scientific community is applauding India for being the first nation to successfully land on the south side of the moon in its mission to search for frozen water that could provide life for future space exploration. Meanwhile, back on Earth, the Ganges, which provides water for a half-a-billion people remains one of the most polluted rivers in the world. Water-borne illnesses are estimated to cause the death of 1.5 million children a year.
The Government of Canada has spent more than \$2.4 million in the search and recovery of the Titan, which imploded, killing five millionaires. Neither the federal nor provincial government will fund the recovery of bodies belonging to Indigenous women believed buried in a garbage dump, adding insult to the indignity of their deaths. Politicians throughout the world share a common trait: they worry more about their international reputation, status and legacy than their own homeless people who live in squalor, and often suffer from mental illness and substance misuse.
Frieda Huffman, Hamilton

Failing on health and education

What is going on in this country? We have Pierre Poilievre, the Conservative leader who supported the historic, catastrophic three-week truckers' convoy in Ottawa and just complains about Trudeau without any suggestions of his own. Then there's the Progressive Conservative premier whose corruption is mind-boggling, selling out our farmland and wetlands to superrich developers! And yet our hospitals and schools are in a catastrophic state of affairs. Hospitals with continued understaffing and overworked nurses. What is being done? Nothing. Educational assistants, who are so important for the kids and teachers, are overworked and underpaid, leaving in droves, and yet all we hear about is Ford's corruption with developers. Do something for the people of this province regarding health care and education!
Gerd Muller, Hamilton

New doesn't equal affordable

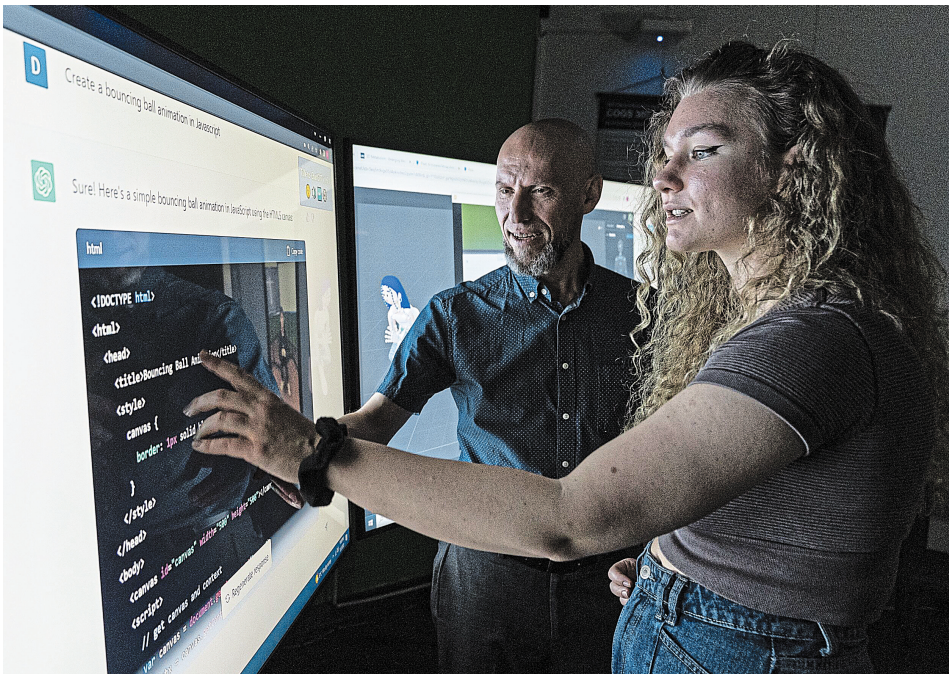
"Building houses to meet affordability targets." I am tired of reading that sick meme in The Spectator. Building houses does not create affordability. Let's not continue to fool ourselves. Building thousands of homes means the rich can continue to buy houses — or perhaps, the new houses may remain empty — but it will not make a dent in housing affordability. There are many houses and apartments available right now that could be affordable if houses and rents were removed from the profit-making motive. The houses built today are built to make money, not to house people. Those who continue to spout out-of-date economic laws are fooling themselves. Building more houses will not create affordability. New, creative laws are needed to make that happen.
Renate Manthei, Hamilton

Flying the plane to Cuba

Regarding "The Hijacking of Freedom": The author claims right-wing extremists have hijacked the freedom plane. His answer is to overthrow the hijackers and fly the plane to Cuba.
Chris Asimoudis, Ancaster

Skelly's disappointment

So, Donna Skelly is "terribly disappointed" with Hamilton city council. She states there is not enough land to build housing within the current urban boundary. Perhaps she should take a drive around the city to see all of the vacant land and properties that exist. All of them are serviced and have transportation close by. An example is the three-kilometre stretch along Main Street West between Osler Drive and Westdale High School. There are nine large, vacant lots/properties half of which have been sitting vacant for more than eight years. Several thousand people could be housed in apartments/condos on these properties, hopefully at affordable prices. This would be a far better alternative to building single-family, million-dollar homes on unserviced farmland.
Marion Brooks, Dundas



A professor works with a student on ChatGPT prompts. McMaster educator David L. Clark discusses why he has decided to keep AI out of his university classroom.

RICH LAM
THE CANADIAN PRESS
FILE PHOTO

A letter to my students: You don't need AI in class

DAVID L. CLARK

Artificial intelligence may be an advanced technology, but it is still early days in determining whether or how it should be integrated into the university classroom. AI may well prove to be generative in some courses. But for now, I am declaring AI off limits.
Unlike AI, I am obliged to explain myself. So to my diligent and thoughtful students, let me say this: The literary and philosophical texts I teach call for specific analytical skills, skills that you learn by actively wrestling with the materials — parsing the arguments of others and, step-by-step, and in consultation with peers and professors, developing responses that you can truly call your own.
When asked what the motto of the genuinely quizzical citizen was, the 18th-century Prussian philosopher Immanuel Kant famously exclaimed, "Dare to think for yourself!" He said this to counter the tendency that he saw around him to defer too quickly to the authorities; after all, it seemed more "efficient" and "easier" to do so when there were "goals" to be met, tasks to be completed, and ladders to climb.
But at what cost to your education, and to the growth of your thinking, not only now but also for the future, he asks?
I'm not with Kant on many things,

but on this question, as an educator, I am. Efficiency, speed, and skipping steps are not always in the service of the good much less the good education.
So, rather than let your learning experience be colonized by sentences that cannot be attributed to you or, for that matter, to anyone, and rather than treating education as something to be extracted or rooted in extraction, i.e., as yet another instance of reaping the materials that you have commanded a machine to scrape out of the world, the course you are taking with me is designed to help you think your own thoughts and to struggle with the materials at hand on your own terms.
The key here is to engage the course's difficult questions, as only you and I can — bravely and uncertainly. As your professor, I have unwavering confidence in your ability to do so, and to endure the travail of experiencing new, troubling, and alien ideas.
My hope is that my confidence in you instills a corresponding confidence in yourself. And by constantly questioning my own understandings I hope to model something very different from AI, which forms elegant sentences but is incapable of querying its own assumptions.
There is so much to learn by going through the agonistic and often pleasurable process of immersing yourself in the thoughts of others,

and of working collaboratively with fellow learners — of which I am one — in forging a path that embraces difficulty rather than seeks to minimize its impact.
For what if that trouble is a crucially important element of both teaching and learning the materials, not an impediment to be quashed by any means necessary but a crucially important part of what these materials mean and how they work? AI dreams of an education without trouble. But an education without trouble is mere programming.
Some of you may feel pressure to compete and "succeed," because you are schooled into reaching for standards that can seem out of reach. Yet the vast majority of students I have had the good fortune to teach *court* rather than flee difficulty.
You have no reason to turn to a faceless machine when you have each other, and your professor, to walk with you down the wondrously unclear path of education.
Letting a machine speak for you or for me is at odds with the very idea of education as a process in which no one has the last word. And as my mentor, the late Dr. Ross G. Woodman would say at the end of his letters to me, "I am joined with you in these endless labours."
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The Greedbelt: The sad story of Mr. Ford and the iceberg

DAVE DAVIS

I was talking to young friends the other day about their recent trip to Newfoundland. I asked if they saw any icebergs on their visit. "No," one of them said. "It was August, too late for them." They did see lots of that beautiful province. They got screeched. They kissed a cod and drank something only Newfoundlanders understand. They, a happy couple, even got married (a topic for another day). Sadly, though, no icebergs.
Naturally, I thought of Doug Ford. It's not as big a leap as you might think, the iceberg-to-premier thing. Here's why.
We know lots about icebergs: their small above-water appearance and huge underwater heft (they say only a 10th of the iceberg shows above water). Their tendency to calve or slice off parts of themselves, one piece after another. Their ultimate dissolution and disappearance, lost in a warming sea. That's why, even from St. John's, you can't see them in the late summer.
We also know lots about Mr. Ford's government, though, I'd venture, not as much as we do about icebergs. Here are a few examples. The premier's verbal defence of health-care providers during COVID-19, yet his strange reluctance to pay them appropriately during a period of marked inflation. His disappearance during the convoy fiasco in Ottawa; turtles could take lessons from this man. His use of the notwithstanding clause to silence

debate on campaign financing. In case you've forgotten, this was a big constitutional baseball bat used to promote something that might help elect future conservative governments. There's lots more: his government's handling of the COVID crisis, his (mis)management of long-term care, his promotion of a highway that nobody needs. It's a long list.
And then there's this one, the most recent: the Greenbelt fiasco.
In case you've been in an induced coma for the past few months (or maybe just got married in Newfoundland), this particular broken promise sees the release of thousands of acres of Greenbelt, converting them from their original designation protecting and retaining huge swaths of undeveloped, wild or agricultural land.
Greenbelts nurture wildlife and preserve the environment around Ontario's large and growing urban footprint.
Just to be clear: that's thousands fewer undeveloped acres supporting precious wetlands and natural landscape. Instead, government spokespeople have said (with a straight face) those acres will be converted to meet our need for new homes in Ontario. Can you imagine workers, already struggling against the high tide of jacked-up interest rates, buying a one-acre home in the Greenbelt? Or homeless people? Me either.
Multiple reports agree. They point to the potential damage to the province's environment and thus to

the climate. They point to the existence of more than enough buildable land already available. And they point to this (try to hide your surprise here): the land swap benefits a very tiny group of about-to-be-very-wealthy developers — Conservative supporters. I might add.
What has this got to do with icebergs? Several years ago, in a fit of angst stirred by leaderless and lacklustre liberals and lefties, I turned rightward in my voting, supporting Mr. Ford and his cronies. I liked his new face, his blue-collar appeal. He looked honest. Poor fellow, he even teared up when he spoke of a relative in a long-term-care setting during COVID.
Years later, I've had my fill. Each of the debacles I listed (there are more: just google Doug Ford controversies) has sliced off a piece of my support for the conservative iceberg, a calving of no small proportion.
This iceberg, a pale blue in my imagination, is in danger of disappearing entirely in a sea of ethical, political and practical warming, melted by its own self-centredness, its failure to remember its promises, and, perhaps the most ironic, the debacle of the awful, terrible, horrible "greedbelt" fiasco.
Yes, you read it right: the greed-belt.
DAVE DAVIS IS A RETIRED FAMILY DOCTOR AND WRITER OF OTHER STUFF, LIKE "A POTTERS TALE" AND "THE LAST IMMORTAL," INTERNATIONAL AWARD-WINNERS. VISIT AMAZON OR DRDAVEDAVIS.COM.