

Letters To The Editor:

Dear Editor: Rick Blair, Clarington My name is Sanjin Zeco, and I'm a resident of Durham Region. I just wanted to spread the word that GTA residents are very much against moving the Ontario Science Center, and building a huge private spa at Ontario Place. The reason I thought you and your readers in Pembroke might be interested in this issue is that every taxpayer in the province will pay at least \$65 so that a foreign-owned private spa can have an underwater parking lot. The deal with Doug Ford's government also includes a 99 year lease to Therme, an Austrian company, with all the details kept secret. I was wondering if people in Oshawa know that this expensive, private, distant facility is being built on land in the GTA, owned by the province, at their expense? We are very concerned that the Provincial Government is wasting our taxes on something that will only be enjoyed by the very few. We feel that the money would be better spent on our health care, affordable housing, roads and infrastructure for the benefit of the entire province. Their plan also includes ruining a beloved park by cutting down hundreds of trees, and unlike our fortunate friends further north, we don't have very many trees to start with.

Dear Editor: Grant Cameron, Vaughan

Housing measures announced earlier and reiterated in today's federal budget are sound initiatives for the most part that will have positive outcomes but there continues to be a lack of support for the first-time homebuyer who has been effectively shut out of the market, says the Residential Construction Council of Ontario (RESCON).

"We commend the federal government for seriously trying. There are positive measures here to assist purpose-built rental housing supply. That much is encouraging," says RESCON president Richard Lyall. "But there is no relief for first-time buyers who have been pushed out of the market. They are being taxed on new housing at rates which would have crushed their parents and grandparents. Why are we doing that to them? Housing is a vital need and we are taxing it like alcohol and cigarettes. The cost of housing used to be three times the average household income but now it's 10 times." Presently, 31 per cent of the cost of buying a new home is attributable to taxes, fees and levies, according to a study done by the Canadian Centre for Economic Analysis. Seventy-six per cent of people seeking to buy a home can't afford to buy and live in what is being built. The average Canadian home costs \$741,000 and the minimum income required to qualify for a mortgage is \$195,000. Disturbingly, incomes have not kept pace with the increased cost of buying a home.

For people seeking affordable housing, and especially those looking to buy their first home, the picture does not look bright. Housing starts are expected to decline and prices are expected to rise. This will make it even more difficult for first-time buyers. Many young people are leaving our cities and seeking accommodation elsewhere because they can't afford a home.

While we are encouraged to see changes in the budget, including an increase to the capital cost allowance rate for apartments from four to 10 per cent, and commitments regarding activating crown land for housing as well as impactful measures with respect to immigration that will encourage newcomers with skilled trades, there continues to be a lack of support for the first-time homebuyer.

"The government's failure to take solid steps to help first-time homebuyers is short-sighted and self-defeating in terms of meeting the challenge of the housing affordability and supply crisis," says Lyall. "To ensure the health of our economy, we must do more to help these homebuyers get a foothold in the market. The budget missed the mark on that front. We must help young Canadians who want to buy their first home. They are the future of this country."

RESCON is the province's leading association of residential builders committed to providing leadership and fostering innovation in the industry.

Dear Editors: Chuong Nguyen, Aristotle Foundation for Public Policy

It's been just over six months since the October 7th attacks on Israeli soil, and the debate around Islamism has returned to Western political discourse—along with the accusation of 'Islamophobia' repeatedly and callously hurled.

For instance, in the wake of the attacks on Jews, schools across Canada have been urged to address and remedy not anti-Semitism but 'Islamophobia'. Similarly, at the beginning of Ramadan this year, Amira Elghawaby, Canada's Special Representative on Combating Islamophobia, stated: "Muslims in Canada are particularly impacted by the war in Gaza, which has caused continuous anguish and sorrow within our diverse communities."

The blanket charge of 'Islamophobia', instead of being used to repudiate bigotry against Muslims, has seemingly become a blunt instrument in silencing discourse on the dangers that political Islam poses to free speech and the values held by free societies. Critically, in some cases, this danger can even result in the tragic loss of life.

On the morning of November 2nd, 2004, the Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh was cycling to his production studio in Amsterdam, when Muhammad Bouyeri approached van Gogh and shot him several times. Van Gogh fell off his bike and collapsed down the road. His last words were a desperate plea to the killer: "Can't we talk about this?" Bouyeri then shot van Gogh four more times, took one of his butcher knives to the victim's throat, and stabbed the other knife onto his chest, bearing a five-page letter. The letter was addressed to Ayaan Hirsi Ali, a Somali immigrant serving then as a Member of the Dutch Parliament.

Two months prior, he and Hirsi Ali were collaborating on a short film titled Submission, Part 1. The 11-minute short features a nameless woman in dialogue with Allah. She represents women who have been abused in the name of the Islamic faith, including Hirsi Ali herself. Written on her body are Quran verses highlighting the unequal status of men and women under Islam.

Two years prior, a prominent Dutch politician, Pim Fortuyn, was gunned down in a car park, after giving an interview on talk radio; it was the first political assassination on Dutch soil in 400 years. Of note, Fortuyn was openly gay, a supporter of gay rights, and highly vocal in his criticisms of Islamism. He saw in political Islamism a system of oppression against those who share his sexual orientation. Routinely labeled as 'far-right' by his detractors, he fiercely rejected this libel. Sadly, the murderer claimed there was "no other way he could stop that danger than to kill [him], ... [as he] saw in Fortuyn an increasing danger to, in particular, vulnerable sections of society."

In a functioning free society, one can disagree with people like van Gogh, Hirsi Ali, or Fortuyn without taking up arms and aiming for their lives. But not for a political Islamist, or a sympathizer of Islamism (like Fortuyn's killer), where force is clearly considered an option. Hence, the naivety of the 'Islamophobia' charge. For all intents and purposes, it represents a refusal to reckon with the dangers of political Islamism in the name of "anti-racism". It is time we all ask: "Can't we talk about this?" As long as we refuse to learn from the tragic deaths of van Gogh and Fortuyn, in addition to the tireless warnings of Hirsi Ali, public discourse will be in even graver danger than it already is.

Dear Editor: Nadia Todorova, RCCAO Executive Director

The Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario (RCCAO) welcomes news of the new agreement reached by the Government of Ontario and Government of Canada that enables Highway 413 to finally move forward. Today's Memorandum of Understanding between the two governments, paves the way for Highway 413 construction to continue to proceed, while maintaining robust and comprehensive environmental protections.

"The advancement of Highway 413 marks a significant victory for GTA residents, promising not only reduced commuting times, but also enhanced quality of life and bolstered economic growth," said Nadia Todorova, Executive Director of RCCAO. "Highway 413 will enhance connectivity between communities, create new jobs, and promote more transportation options for commuters and businesses in this rapidly growing region."

RCCAO has been a leading advocate for the construction of Highway 413 and other critical transportation infrastructure projects. RCCAO's commissioned polling, starting in 2021, has consistently revealed strong support for building Highway 413, the Bradford Bypass and the construction of new roads and highways across the province. As Ontario's economy and population grows, demand will increase on all infrastructure, from transit, highways, roads, bridges, water and wastewater to housing. RCCAO welcomes the Government of Ontario's continued efforts to confront these issues with focussed investments in critical infrastructure that will set the stage for a prosperous and sustainable future for all Ontarians.

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