



A Weekly Column by Dean Hickey

# THE FINAL TAKE

AN UNVARNISHED LOOK AT THE MANY  
SOCIAL & POLITICAL ISSUES OF OUR TIME...



## DEATH LEAVES A HEARTACHE NO ONE CAN HEAL, BUT LOVE LEAVES A MEMORY NO ONE CAN STEAL

IF I CAN DESCRIBE HUMAN NATURE as a menagerie of thoughts and ideas, then human nature, as it has lately subsisted in me, has been much too detached from the harshness that is manifesting itself all around us.

The mass shooting that occurred recently in the remote town of Tumbler Ridge, British Columbia, resulting in the deaths of eight victims plus the perpetrator, is a prime example. It ranks as one of the deadliest mass shootings in Canadian history, yet with literally thousands of reported shootings in the U.S. and overseas during the last ten years, the degree to which I have become desensitized is almost frightening.

In an age dominated by 24-hour cable news networks and the constant sharing of violent images on all manner of social media platforms, it's easy to simply say to oneself "How unfortunate for those people" then turn our attention quickly away, just as we turn the pages of a newspaper. There will always be yet another in a never-ending succession of unhappy events where one or more people have suffered greatly. It becomes routine to hear about them.

The world witnessed an absolute barbaric attack on October 7, 2023 carried out by Hamas – resulting in the killing of at least 1,219 Israeli citizens and the taking of 251 hostages. Since that time, we have watched the slow destruction of an entire region and the deaths of over 70,000 people due to the religious ideology and nationalist goals held by those same Islamic terrorists.

Then there is the war in Ukraine, which escalated into a full-scale Russian invasion four years ago. That ongoing conflict is characterized by a grinding war of attrition on the ground, and the total death toll is now estimated to be in the hundreds of thousands. Daily images of war-torn cities are on a scale too large to fully comprehend.

Added to all of this are the countless deaths due to other events such as natural disasters. In the last ten years, approximately 221,000 people have perished worldwide. This can be brought much closer to home as we think of friends and neighbours having lost their lives due to structure fires and even automobile accidents.

The American writer, Madeleine L'Engle, once said "Death is contagious; it is contracted the moment we are conceived." That may well be true for everyone, but until it touches us personally – and profoundly – we carry on in a collective effort to erase much of what we see happening around us, and we forget just how precious, and vulnerable, life on this planet actually is.

To that end, certain realities recently came crashing through a portion of the emotional wall which has so far been a capable protector of my overall well-being. I experienced the sudden and unexpected loss of a trusted companion – someone who needed my influence as much as I needed hers. Gradually the circumstances of my friend's death, which at first I was totally unable to grasp, began to acquire a lasting coherence in my mind. That quality of formulating a unified whole has manifested itself in several ways, not least of which is my sudden concern for everyone who has lost anyone – whether in war, sickness, or that inescapable reality, old age.

On my most recent Facebook news feed since the Tumbler Ridge tragedy in B.C. was an image of one of the parents of a 12-year old shooting victim holding a framed photograph of her daughter. The look on the mother's face made its way straight through my pupils and into that part of my brain where compassion is stored. I can only imagine how awful the loss of a child so young could actually be.

Then I realized the same must be said for the family in Ukraine whose child was the victim of a Russian drone attack, or the parents of someone killed by a collapsing building in Gaza. My own recent experience has turned these unfortunate victims of war into actual human beings – far from being seen as just another in a series of statistics from far-away nations over conflicts I have no ability to change.

Nevertheless, there is a flip-side to all of this. As a man of faith, it gives me great discomfort to say there are many people in this world of today who simply do not deserve to live, and whose lives should be taken away from them. That's a direct contradiction from accepting that we are all God's creation, and that to wantonly take a life is in fact a sin, but the concept of evil exists throughout humanity, whether you believe in a higher power or not.

Each of us has the ability to make hard choices – either for the benefit of mankind or for something sinister, often resulting in the deaths of innocent people. We all know who the worst among us are, and they usually carry guns.

Our planet has long since become a series of armed camps, and there will be a great deal more deaths among us in the days, years, and even generations to come. Whether it is the loss of someone special in peacetime or in the agony of war, the following words written by British author Vera Brittain are timeless:

I hear your voice in the whispering trees,  
I see your footprints on each grassy track,  
Your laughter echoes gaily down the breeze  
But you will not be coming back.

The twilight skies are tender with your smile,  
The stars look down with eyes for which I yearn,  
I dream that you are with me all the while  
But you will not return.

The flowers are gay in gardens that you knew,  
The woods you loved are sweet with summer rain,  
The fields you trod are empty now – but you  
Will never come again.



# THE Mr. X Files

## By John Mutton

CENTRAL EXCLUSIVE

Karmageddon

By Mr. 'X' ~ John Mutton  
CENTRAL EXCLUSIVE

Mr. X on Municipal Election-Year Advertising in Ontario

### Executive Summary

Municipal election timing in Ontario has changed over the years — from January nomination openings, to April, and now to May. While these procedural adjustments appear administrative, they have meaningful implications for governance, political fairness, and the appropriate use of public funds. One principle, however, has remained constant: Public funds must not be used to promote the electoral prospects of an incumbent. Even when not explicitly illegal, special advertising that highlights a sitting mayor during an election year has long been discouraged. The issue is not merely technical legality — it is public trust.

### 1. Legislative Framework

Municipal elections in Ontario are governed by the Municipal Elections Act, 1996. Pre-2016: Nominations opened in January of the election year. 2016 Reform: Moved to May 1, lengthening the official campaign period. 2022 Reform: Nominations now open May 2 and close in August, with voting in October. These changes shortened the formal campaign window but extended the informal pre-nomination political period. That shift has heightened sensitivity around municipal communications in election years.

### 2. The Core Governance Principle

While the Act may not explicitly prohibit all municipal advertising during an election year, public-sector ethics standards and best practices are clear: Municipal communications must inform — not promote.

Municipalities commonly adopt election-year advertising blackout policies to avoid: - Perceived incumbency advantage - Misuse of public funds - Integrity Commissioner complaints - Reputational damage - Legal escalation

### 3. The Incumbency Advantage Problem

Public Funds and Political Benefit: Taxpayer-funded communications must remain neutral. Advertising that highlights achievements, resembles campaign messaging, or focuses heavily on one elected official risks crossing into electioneering territory.

### Unequal Playing Field:

Challengers must finance their own visibility. An incumbent benefiting from municipally funded exposure enjoys broader reach, enhanced credibility, and implicit institutional endorsement.

Public Trust and Institutional Risk: Even when technically compliant, optics matter. Governance depends on neutrality, integrity, and separation between administration and politics.

### 4. What Is Generally Acceptable

Typically allowed: - Routine operational communications - Emergency messaging - Statutory notices - Previously approved programs continuing without expansion

Typically restricted: - New promotional campaigns - Achievement-based advertising - Mayor-focused visibility - Major announcements timed strategically in election year

The dividing line is clear: Information is permissible. Promotion is not.

### 5. The Timing Shift: January to May

While nominations now open in May, political sensitivity begins earlier. Prudent municipalities exercise restraint well before nominations officially open. The technical start date does not determine the ethical start of caution.

### 6. Strong Mayor Powers and Elevated Risk

Where strong mayor authorities exist, communications tied to the mayor carry greater political weight.

Restraint becomes even more important to preserve democratic fairness.

### 7. Governance Versus Campaigning

There is a critical distinction between communicating municipal business and marketing the mayor. The former is governance. The latter is politics.

### 8. The Democratic Standard

Municipal democracy relies upon equal opportunity to compete, clear separation between public administration and campaign activity, and responsible stewardship of taxpayer funds. Advertising that disproportionately benefits an incumbent undermines these principles — even if structured to avoid explicit violations.

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