



A Weekly Column by Dean Hickey

THE FINAL TAKE

AN UNVARNISHED LOOK AT THE SOCIAL AND POLITICAL ISSUES OF OUR TIME



ANOTHER LOOK AT THE NEED TO ELIMINATE INDIVIDUAL SCHOOL BOARDS ALTOGETHER

LAST WEEK IN THIS SPACE I said Ontario’s individual school boards are basically out of control and that it’s long-past time to eliminate them altogether. If I needed any reassurance that I was right about that, it came by way of a few social media responses to my column.

One person I’ll refer to as Jenn had this to say, “Just like the Ministry of Education and its Minister, you have no idea what goes on in a public school or in the realm of public education. I welcome you to spend a week in my school.” Aside from the unlikely prospect of gaining entry to her classroom, I responded by saying the issues I highlighted are in fact, mere ‘drops in the bucket’ as to what’s been going on in the current system of school administration.

When I suggested that she offer up at least some form of defense as to the examples I chose – those I still believe to be the most indicative of a radical agenda – she doubled down on rhetoric without specifics, suggesting “The system is broken, and it starts with the Ministry.” I see. So, instead of sharing with me the potential benefits of local school boards focusing more on race and gender politics than on basic education like reading, writing, and arithmetic, her finger points directly to the very Education Ministry that is attempting to make some sense of it all.

I get the fact that an educator with over two decades of experience will likely feel caught in a trap. If they try to defend what many see as entirely indefensible, they’ll be seen as radicals. At the same time, should they publicly oppose the mandate set by what I’ll call Marxist educators, their likely chance of promotion within a ‘broken system’ will be almost non-existent.

Getting back to the social media responses, a fellow I’ll call Jeffery told me, in his infinite wisdom, that my position on the issue was “moronic”. Well, with that kind of diction, surely Jeffery possesses a unique member ID which he now uses to access all the benefits and resources of the Toastmasters Club. Way to go, little man.

One person, who preferred to remain cowardly – that is to say ‘anonymous’ on Facebook, actually had the comical fortitude to suggest I was somehow in a homosexual relationship after having read my column. I hope that wasn’t a subtle invitation, whoever you are. I’m seriously not interested.

As to being serious, I can tell my readers with certainty that my references in last week’s column undoubtedly form the basis of a collective attack on our local student population. The reasons for that are the controversial policies established by the Durham District School Board that have focused on so-called human rights issues related to gender identity, race, and the content of school libraries. All of which has ignited a fierce public debate as well as protests from concerned parents, and rightly so.

What is happening in the debate over whether the classroom is the proper place for discussions about race and gender identification is that school boards are now tossing around references to the Canadian Human Rights Code as a means to do two things – justify teaching children about very sensitive issues that have noting whatever to do with a well-rounded education, and to basically get away with literally forcing a radical social agenda onto students without parental consent.

Here’s just one example. In 2023, then-chair of the Durham District School Board, Donna Edwards, stopped a meeting twice during a question period that had quickly grown heated over concerns about gender identity, the appropriateness of school reading materials, and so-called discrimination issues.

Her comments to concerned parents wishing to express their views were less than inspiring. “We do welcome and value diverse community perspectives and questions, we appreciate that these can help support our learning and shape different ways of thinking, however; questions, interactions and discussions within our classrooms, schools, workplace and boardroom must be respectful and free of discrimination. Questions or comments that erase or demean identities protected under the Canadian Human Rights Code or that perpetuate stereotypes, discrimination or assumptions are not acceptable.”

Remarks such as those appear manifestly arranged to cast the shadow of a legal noose over the heads of anyone who dares to exercise their own rights of free speech – something too many Boards appear to have little time for, unless it be to support their own social and political agenda.

At the same meeting, things again became heated when trustees were questioned on the appropriateness of school reading materials, specifically the graphic novel “Gender Queer” by Maia Kobabe, which includes a sexually explicit illustration. A question that was submitted for the purposes of discussion was ultimately censored by the Board to remove the term “pornographic illustrations.”

In answer to the question, a senior administrator advised those concerned that the book had been reviewed by the board following a complaint from a parent during the previous school year – and that a review committee made up of educators, administration, superintendents and students found the novel aligned with the board’s “education policy”.

There’s the rub. Is it acceptable School Board policy to potentially institutionalize a form of disrespect toward parental rights? How about the consequences of overstepping legal boundaries by acting in a manner more suited to a court of law when providing self-serving interpretations used to counter any opposition?

It is widely observed and frequently reported in local media that there are low levels of public awareness and engagement regarding School Board elections and candidates. This is a recognized challenge, with several factors contributing to the issue. School Board elections are held concurrently with Municipal elections every four years, and historically, they tend to have significantly lower voter turnout compared to other levels of government. That shows a clear and dangerous lack of engagement. Voters often report difficulty finding information about individual candidates, their platforms, and the specific role and responsibilities of a school board trustee.

One of the more intelligent social media comments I received came from someone named Jake, who had this to say: “...this proposal by the Ontario government is a bid to centralize power, so how would you feel if the (NDP) were removing trustees and appointing supervisors? Because the provincial Conservatives will not be in power forever, but this Bill will still be law whenever they’re gone.” Good point, and my reply must focus on what I see as the need for consistency throughout the province. Regardless of which political party holds the reins of power, it would be a far better thing to have a single entity – not only responsible for setting policies, but to be accountable to the public. The days of individual domains controlled by radical School Boards must be brought to an end. Quickly.



Lisa Robinson

PICKERING CITY COUNCILLOR

Lest We Forget — And Lest We Surrender What They Fought For

By Councillor Lisa Robinson

Every November, I make my way to Pickering’s cenotaph — my favourite place in this city. It’s quiet there. Sacred. A place where gratitude replaces politics and pride replaces excuses.

We’ve built something special there — the Poppy Walkway, lined with vibrant red, and the Remembrance Sidewalk, guiding every step toward reflection. They’re more than beautification projects — they’re symbols of a Canada that once stood for courage, duty, and sacrifice.

I have family who served. Their stories of honour and love of country shaped who I am. And maybe that’s why this day means so much to me — because I’ve spent my own life standing for the same freedom they fought to protect. But lately, I’ve watched

those freedoms — of speech, conscience, and expression — being chipped away, piece by piece. Freedom doesn’t vanish overnight. It fades when good people stop defending it. And that’s what I fear most — that too many are afraid to stand anymore. The only thing necessary for evil to triumph is for good men to do nothing. And right now, too many good men and women are doing nothing. We used to have Canadians who would run toward danger — even lie about their age — to defend their families and their freedom. Today, too many won’t even risk criticism. They’d rather fit in than stand up. Even here in Pickering, I’ve watched the change up close. Councillors proudly wearing lanyards and pins for special interest causes, but nothing of the Canadian flag — unless it’s Canada Day. Not on their jackets. Not in their offices. Not on their hearts.

And some of these same councillors have even liked posts on social media that the Canadian flag is a “symbol of colonial violence.” Yet they still work part-time at our local Legion — the very place built to honour the men and women who fought under that flag. I can think of nothing more hypocritical, or more disgusting. And when I tried to bring back something as simple, as sacred, as our National Anthem before Council meetings, not one councillor would second my motion. Not one. For seven long months, I fought for something that should never have needed a fight — a simple act of respect for our country and for the veterans who died so that we could stand in that chamber and debate freely. And what did the Mayor do? Instead of allowing my motion to stand, he used his Strong Mayor powers to bury it inside a package of unrelated measures that stripped away even more of our local freedoms — measures I could never support in good conscience.

He forced my hand — deliberately — so that I’d be made to look like I was voting against the very thing I had begged for for seven months. And make no mistake — the only reason that anthem finally returned wasn’t because of patriotism. It was because of political optics. The Mayor folded it into his “Elbows Up” movement — a show of defiance against President Trump, not a show of love for Canada. It had nothing to do with honouring our veterans, our flag, or our freedoms — and everything to do with opportunism.

That’s the kind of leadership we’re dealing with. Even this week, when we raised the poppy flag at City Hall, I looked around the crowd and saw it plain as day: the Mayor and other members of Council stood in silence — I couldn’t hear a single voice singing. I couldn’t even see their lips moving. That silence broke my heart.

Because silence is how freedom dies — not with violence, but with indifference.

We have politicians who will bend our flag-raising policy to appease every special interest group under the sun — but won’t lift a finger to honour the men and women who died under the one flag that unites us all. We have veterans sleeping in tents while photo-op patriots boast about inclusivity. The same people who claim to “care” about justice can’t be bothered to care about those who gave everything for them to speak freely.

This is not who we were meant to be. We used to be a proud, unapologetic, united country. Now, too many are afraid to even say the word Canadian. Well, I refuse to be one of them. I will not apologize for standing up for my country. I will not be silent to spare the feelings of those who’ve forgotten who they serve. Because remembrance isn’t a ceremony — it’s a duty. It’s not about wearing a poppy once a year. It’s about living the values that poppy represents: courage, integrity, and the will to stand when everyone else bows. This Remembrance Day, I’ll be at that cenotaph again, beneath the flag they fought for, surrounded by the spirits of heroes who never came home. And I’ll make the same promise I’ve always made: That I will stand for freedom. That I will speak the truth. And that I will never stop fighting for the Canada they believed in. Because I will never forget. And I will never surrender.

Lest we forget — and lest we surrender. With gratitude, Councillor Lisa Robinson
“The People’s Councillor” “Strength Does Not Lie In The Absence Of Fear, But In The Courage To Face It Head-On And Rise Above It”



Scrolling Away the Days - How Social Media is Consuming the Life of Every Adolescent

By Camryn Bland
Youth Columnist

Social media has been incorporated into the routines of billions of people daily. It is used for entertainment, information, and creativity, all beneficial concepts at their core. The current issue isn’t with the idea of social media, but with the modern purposes of its usage and the degree it’s relied on.

Not only is social media incorporated into the lives of so many individuals, but it is a time commitment that is much longer than one would believe. Short-form content, such as tiktok or instagram reels are often used as a time filler, something to watch in a spare moment. Every time I get on a bus, walk into a cafeteria, or wait for a class to begin, I witness countless people facing their phones. When adding all these simple moments in a day, a few minutes of screen time can easily turn into hours wasted.

This wasted time is something which I cannot avoid in my daily life. I am a busy student who has very little free time, yet I always manage to spend more time online than I ever intended to. Any free time which I have should be rewarded by an activity which makes me feel good. I should spend my time reading, going outside, or baking, not watching others do these activities as if they’re a far off dream. In 2025, it has become easier to watch others enjoy their lives than to live our own, yet our dreams are calling from the other side of the device.

My phone usage feels like an unbreakable cycle. The more overwhelmed I feel, the more I want to relax, which leads to doomscrolling on every social media app I have. This wasted time makes me feel much more anxious than I did when I began, and the cycle repeats. What was originally used to reduce my stress only continues to increase it, creating an addiction difficult to fight.

When you read about social media, it seems almost silly how the lives of so many people revolve around something they could delete with the click of a button.

The solution is right in front of me, yet I never choose to break the habit. I fear what I will miss out on, the jokes I will no longer understand. How will it affect my friendships if I am the only one offline? Will I be the last to hear the news if I remove my sources? How will I relax if I cannot scroll? Disconnection is the rational answer to fight a phone addiction, yet the hardest promise to commit to. The issue with this media doesn’t just come from the time commitment, but from the negative mood associated with it. When I finally disconnect, I feel worse than I did when I began scrolling. When I am online, I am fed a constant stream of comparison, upsetting news, and fake information. This outlet is no longer entertaining, informative, or creative, but a key source of anxiety and regret. One of the main influences of this regret is the comparison which stems from social media. Whether it be beauty, lifestyle, or success, influencers post the highlights of their lives, leaving out any inconvenience which may seem undesirable.

Almost every post undergoes edits and tweaks before being seen by the vulnerable viewer, to make their posts, and their overall lives, appear perfect. This content causes feelings of shame and disappointment in my own life, despite the fact I know what I view is unrealistic. Social media is no longer about what is real and fake, it’s about what makes adolescents feel something, even if that’s jealousy and dejection.

These wasted hours are not solely the fault of the viewer; the addiction can be traced back to the algorithms which are keeping viewers hooked. Every social media platform, whether that be tiktok, instagram, youtube, or facebook are all designed to keep you coming back for more. It collects data from your interaction history, modelling itself to do whatever makes you interested. It is an effective strategy which keeps the media thriving and individuals struggling with an addiction to watching one more video.

Every night, I promise myself I will reduce my screen time tomorrow. I understand the consequences of the manipulative system, yet the next day I scroll just as much as before. It is useless, as something created to inspire creativity and enjoyment leaves me more unmotivated than ever before. I could spend hours scrolling through the algorithm, yet not remember a single video which I watched. It’s a cycle which needs to be broken, a jail cell made of screen time which I must break free from. The key is right in front of me, the solution so simple; just delete the social media apps. Yet, it is something I may never be able to do, no matter how bad the consequences may be.