

THE EDITORIAL PAGE

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EDITORIAL Hockey's headhunters

Evidence mounts on danger of concussions

Jessey Grove, a high school football player in Minnesota, missed 43 days of school last year after suffering a concussion. He fared much better than Zack Lystedt, a 13-year-old junior high school football player in Washington state, who couldn't stand for three years after suffering a concussion in 2006. Kayla Meyer, a 15-year-old hockey player in Minnesota, cannot sit in crowded rooms or focus on written words after suffering two concussions that have forced her to abandon what had been her favourite sport since the age of three.

Meyer recently testified at a state Senate hearing on a bill that would make Minnesota the 14th state to impose legal standards for sports concussions, forcing any athlete diagnosed with one to get medical clearance to return to play. These recently publicized cases, coupled with just-released Canadian studies on the effects of concussions in hockey, cause us to reiterate our position taken eight months ago calling for a ban on hitting in minor hockey at least until midget (ages 15 to 17).

Syd Johnson, a Dalhousie University researcher, is of the same opinion. Based on an academic review of existing concussion research, she recently authored a report in the Canadian Medical Association Journal advocating the elimination of bodychecking in all but the most elite levels of youth hockey, where players are at least 16 years of age.

Bodychecking advocates insist that young players must learn to "give a hit and take a hit," a questionable stance considering that the vagaries of physical development result in boys playing against men of the same age. (Hockey Calgary is considering a ban on bodychecking for 11- and 12-year-olds at the pee-wee level.)

This is not just a matter of injury, but development. According to Johnson, even a "simple" concussion can have devastating effects on athletic and academic performance.

A year ago, this was hardly on the public radar. But the head injury to Sidney Crosby in January was the tipping point.

A University of Calgary study published this week, also in the Canadian Medical Association Journal, showed that NHL players who do not receive immediate attention to concussions are out of action for longer periods of time. It again raises the issue of why the NHL won't give stronger protection to its most prized assets.

Thoroughbred race horse owners seem to care more about their investments than the NHL, considering the league's reluctance to come down hard on the Vancouver Canucks' Raffi Torres for his brutal shoulder hit to the head of Chicago Blackhawk Brent Seabrook. The league's excuse? The hit occurred in the narrow space behind the net, where headhunters apparently get a free pass.

That gives us a headache.

Healing the heart

Good grief! We're not mental health professionals, but a recommendation that would make it easier for doctors to diagnose grief as a mental disorder strikes us as, well, crazy.

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders — the go-to guide used by physicians for diagnosing mental illnesses around the world — currently excludes people who are depressed after a recent loss. The so-called grief exclusion clause recognizes grief is a normal reaction to loss, so before it can be diagnosed as a major depressive disorder, the symptoms must persist beyond two months.

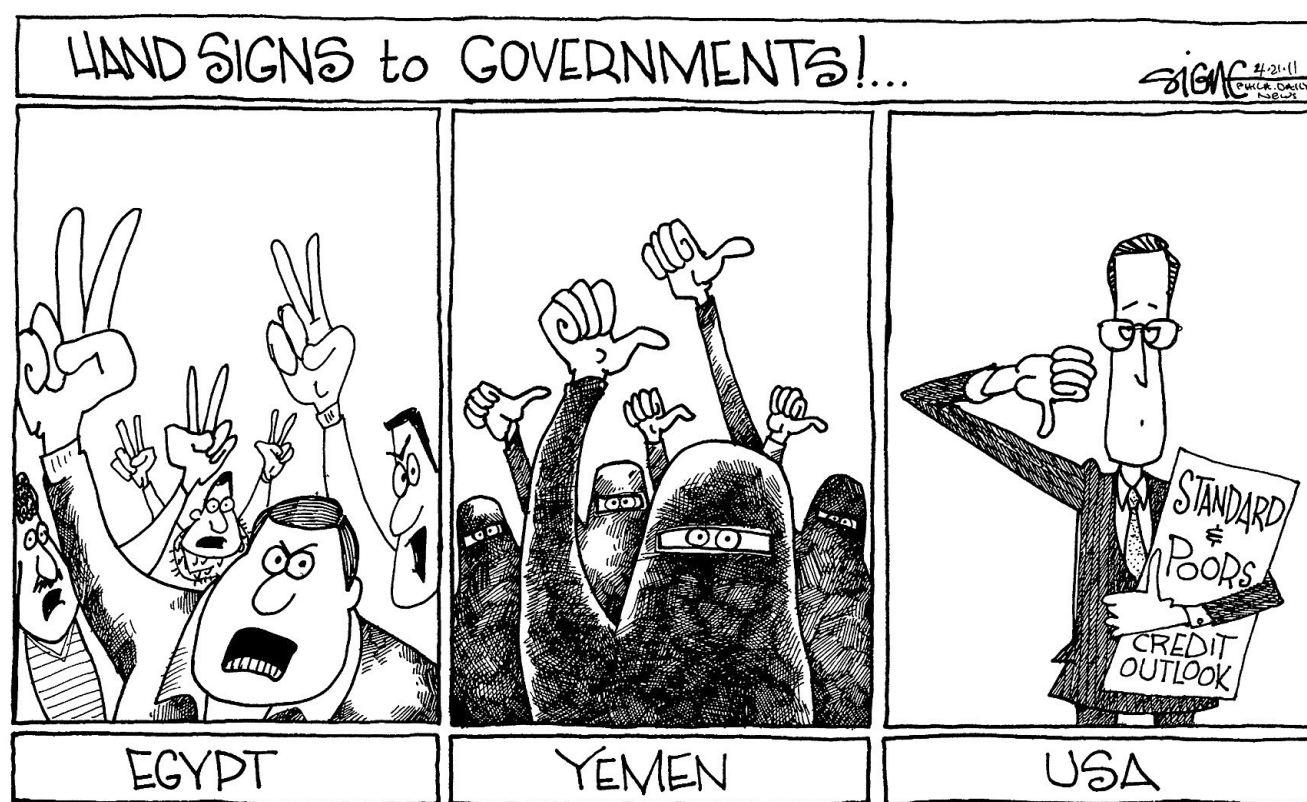
Proposed revisions to the 2013 edition of the manual include a recommendation to remove the clause, so that doctors can intervene sooner when they believe a person's depression is a symptom of a mental disorder. While the change would help those who truly are unwell, it puts those

who don't have a mental illness at risk of being wrongly diagnosed and stigmatized.

Frankly, there are some doctors who would be more concerned about a person who didn't show signs of depression following the loss of, for instance, a child or spouse.

As a society, we are already uncomfortable around the subject of death. The truth is, people can experience symptoms of loss for many years, particularly at critical life events such as birthdays or anniversaries. It's when people get stuck in their grief, and aren't able to perform the daily functions of their lives, that alarms should be raised.

Pathologizing normal human emotion would seem to prolong the grief experience, and increase the chance it will be expressed inappropriately later. Antidepressants might numb emotional pain, but they don't heal the heart, so the recommendation should be rejected.



Language tars debate over Alberta oilsands



PAULA ARAB

Tarsands or oilsands? There is a vast difference, as newcomers to Alberta who have the unpleasant experience of inadvertently using the words interchangeably will quickly discover.

Before we can have an informed conversation about developing the resource responsibly and to its highest environmental standard — a conversation Canadians must start having — we have to get the lexicon correct. This is especially important of policy-makers and politicians.

Tarsands is inaccurate and pejorative. It has become part of the rhetoric of extremists who are anti-oil and who want to shut down the industry.

Tar is a man-made substance that implies toxicity. The bituminous sands in northern Alberta are naturally occurring. Years ago, they were referred to as tarsands because people were familiar with tar as a byproduct of coal.

Today, though, the word has become politicized. It represents a polarization over the language that's so powerful, it aborts the debate before it gets started.

I don't expect average Joe Blokes to know how loaded the word is in Alberta, but I am disappointed by NDP Leader Jack Layton and U.S. President Barack Obama, who both referred

to the oilsands as tarsands recently.

Layton waited until he arrived safely in Quebec, during the first week of the federal election campaign, before voicing his concerns about the oilsands. He promised to scrap the \$2 billion in federal subsidies to "oil companies developing Canada's dirtiest energy sources, like the tarsands."

Layton also called for a "more measured pace of development," including a moratorium on new projects until the environmental footprint is better managed.

Both suggestions — eliminating the subsidies and controlling expansion — are fair comment worthy of debate. It's just too bad Layton didn't have that conversation days earlier, when he was visiting Alberta. Perhaps he could have even taken a trip to Fort McMurray and seen first hand what is being done up there. His failure to do so suggests he was more interested in picking up a few seats in Quebec with cheap shots at the oilsands, rather than engaging Canadians with facts, or telling us what the NDP believes is the role of the federal government in protecting water resources and conducting more stringent environmental monitoring of the region.

But then, election campaigns aren't about intelligent debates about important issues concern-

ing Canadians, as we are witnessing throughout the election trail.

Obama's blunder was more forgivable, upon reading the full transcript of the exchange. He was simply repeating a question on a topic he wasn't expecting.

The full exchange was provided by a U.S. government official.

"My name is Alan Berchel. I'm a Canadian. I just moved here about a year ago. And my question for you today is in reference to the Canadian tarsands..." said the speaker, at a town hall meeting with Obama earlier this month.

"I would like to know how you balance your commitment to the environment with domestic energy security, given that there has been recent domestic dissent from the idea of importing Canadian oil... if you do not import the Canadian tarsands oil, you are opening the door to further investments by Suncor in Canada; as well, you're essentially offering up this very vast and politically stable oil-energy resource to a country like China. I just want to know how you're balancing all these different pressures."

After cracking a few jokes, Obama repeated the word tarsands. "Just to give background to folks, there are these tarsands in Canada that can produce oil. There is talk about building a pipeline into the United States to import that oil."

Tarsands is inaccurate and pejorative. It has become part of the rhetoric of extremists who are anti-oil.

He went on to make general points, and expressed: "these tarsands, there are some environmental questions about how destructive they are, potentially, what are the dangers there, and we've got to examine all those questions."

Instead of sparking a debate about those environmental concerns, Canadians focused on Obama's use of the word tarsands, with suggestions that by doing so, he implied a bias.

The U.S. official cautioned against reading too much into Obama's use of the word.

"Obviously, there are those who use it to try to make a point. But then there are many others, and I would venture to say the vast majority of people, particularly in the States, tend to use them interchangeably because of the historical use of the word, and without being aware of any political significance to it."

The official says Obama is well informed, but was simply caught off guard.

"When he was here during his first overseas trip to Ottawa, at that time, he used the term oilsands. He was focused on Canada, he was reading his briefing materials and he was using the term oilsands."

At the end of the day, Canada has to engage the world in an informed discussion about the oilsands. It would help if politicians used the language correctly.

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RIC MCIVER

High development levies come at a cost

I can almost hear the following conversation taking place: "Make the big, bad developers pay. While you're at it, make the people who build their homes in the suburbs suffer along with them, because they are also the whole problem with our city."

As long as politicians and ideologues continue to repeat this nonsense, we are in trouble. City council is right now in the middle of doing just what is being suggested. Not only that, this is not the first time it has happened. Development fees were dramatically increased about five years ago amid the same rhetoric and citing the same arguments. Those who call this tax-the-industry cry new or progressive are actu-

ally going back in time, not forward.

Developers need to pay. They want to pay. They are willing to pay. At the same time, they never pay, for the same reason the grocery store never pays. When tomatoes go up in price after bad weather in Mexico, your local grocery store pays initially and then passes the cost on to you at the till. When the price is too high, you stop buying tomatoes, use less, go to a canned choice, or just find a grocery store that has negotiated better with the growers. Either way, the grocery store does not pay.

The same is true with land. If the city raises the price of approvals through more levies and taxes, the development industry just passes it on to the builder, who passes it on to the homebuyer. If the home-

buyer finds the price too high, she lives with someone else for longer, finds a less expensive housing choice, finds a smaller home, or goes to a municipality where the taxes and levies are more affordable.

I argue a properly built home should stand for 100 years or more. Consequently, the taxes on that property are directed for that amount of time based on where it is located. If a person moves into that home and pays the additional levy, the city gains one time only, by, for example, \$8,000 spread over 100 years.

If the choice is made to stay living with someone else, the city neither gains nor loses, but it has an unhappy citizen who will leave eventually and take her intellectual abilities, tax dollars and earning potential

with her to benefit some other municipality.

If a less expensive or smaller choice is found, she may or may not be happy there. If she is happy, the city will gain \$8,000 once in 100 years, may gain by providing smaller services, and will likely collect fewer taxes from the dweller at that location for 100 years. I would consider this to be a slight gain for the city.

If she moves to a nearby municipality, she will take her average annual city tax bill of \$1,000, plus her annual city utility taxes of around \$800, with her and another municipality will enjoy that revenue for the rest of her life. She will most likely come into the city five times per week to work and consume a range of city services, while leaving her supporting tax dollars in another jurisdiction. In this

case, the city has traded a one-time fee of \$8,000 for an annual loss of \$1,800 per year for decades, and must still provide many of the services. In this case, the city is a big loser and for a long time.

I am not arguing against higher fees, per se. I am just asking all involved to consider the law of diminishing returns. There is a point where the dollars collected from higher levies actually result in a net loss for those in the city. After the last big increase was imposed, the market share by percentage of new homes built in Calgary versus the surrounding municipalities dropped. This has created a large number of daily visitors to the city consuming services and leaving their tax dollars somewhere else. Certainly, no one in the city saw a decrease in taxes as a result of

driving out growth to other places. Those services are, of course, paid for by those of us who are inside Calgary.

Let's stop blaming citizens. No matter if they choose inner city, suburbs, small homes, large homes or homes somewhere else, they should not be chastised for doing what is in the best interest of themselves and their families.

Rather, let's look before we leap. Let's figure out how to pay for recreation centres, libraries, fire halls and transit in a way that is to the best advantage of Calgarians not only this year, but for the long term.

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