

Province thanked for Greenbelt plans

The Ontario Greenbelt Alliance has congratulated the McGuinty government for beginning the process of growing the Greenbelt in southern Ontario.

"This announcement couldn't have come at a better time, as citizens outside the Greenbelt are facing huge new developments and threats to their local green space and agricultural lands," said Dr. Rick Smith, Executive Director, Environmental Defence.

"I couldn't think of a better way to celebrate the third

anniversary of the Greenbelt than with the announcement of the process to make it bigger and better," said Caroline Schultz, Executive Director, Ontario Nature.

The pattern of proposed development in southern Ontario is threatening to them in the agricultural and Natural Heritage Systems of the Greenbelt before a comprehensive landform conservation plan is established, a fate suffered by the 1970's Parkway Belt.

Since its adoption in 2005, members of Greenbelt

Alliance, environmental groups, ratepayer groups and moms and dads have been asking that Ontario's award-winning Greenbelt be expanded to protect areas of the province now the target of "leap-frog" development.

Ontario's leading environmental groups also united under the banner "Priorities for Ontario" during last fall's provincial election campaign. The coalition found that every mainstream political party supported the Greenbelt, with three advocating for growing the

Greenbelt to reflect the on-the-ground reality of accelerated development applications outside the Greenbelt.

The coalition of 13 leading environmental groups called on all political parties to: Grow the Greenbelt by expanding its boundaries at least into southern Simcoe County and the region of Kitchener/Waterloo/Guelph - areas where sprawl is threatening to leapfrog the current Greenbelt; extend the Rouge protected area to include the Duffins Creek watershed; and pass a Lake

Simcoe Conservation Act to protect this threatened watershed.

The Ontario Greenbelt Alliance has also long called for the expansion of the Greenbelt.

The Greenbelt Alliance cautioned, however, that the hard work of growing the Greenbelt has yet to begin.

"Greenbelt protection must be expanded to protect the Duffins Creek watershed. Duffins Creek is the last intact cold water ecosystem in the GTA," said Sierra Club of Canada, Ontario

Chapter Director Dan McDermott.

"It's no secret that some areas next to the Greenbelt are under more threat than others; Simcoe County, the "Wild West" of land speculation in Ontario, in particular is in need of Greenbelt expansion," said David Donnelly, counsel to Environmental Defence. "Greenbelts don't happen organically; they need leaders and strong action to grow. The announcement sets the stage for finishing the job of protecting Ontario's future."

Lord's Prayer should stay, says MPP

By Bill Rea

Premier Dalton McGuinty has called for an end to the reciting of the Lord's Prayer at the start of the day's work in the provincial legislature.

But York-Simcoe MPP Julia Munro is not impressed. The premier made the announcement last week in a letter he issued.

"It is time to move beyond the daily recitation of the Lord's Prayer in the Ontario legislature to a more inclusive approach that reflects (the) 21st century," he was quoted as stating in last Thursday's Toronto Sun.

Munro said she heard no call for the prayer to be dropped, and she's urging

McGuinty to scrap his government's plan and respect the traditions of the legislature.

She said she has been hearing for constituents reacting to the premier's announcement, and these people are unanimous in their opposition, as they want the prayer maintained.

"The face of Ontario is changing and it's important that we recognize this," said Munro. "However, it is equally as important that we respect and maintain the traditions and history of the Ontario legislature. Part of that tradition is keeping the Lord's Prayer.

"I find it strange, quite

frankly," she remarked, reflecting that the October provincial election hinged on the

Progressive Conservatives' plan to extend funding to faith-based schools. "It strikes me as very odd that he would want to bring in something that obviously is going to create some similar type of controversy. I just don't understand it."

"While jobs disappear and Ontario's economy suffers, Dalton McGuinty thinks it's more important to declare a bungled holiday and talk about doing away with prayers," she observed. "Before McGuinty raised this idea, I had never heard

from any of my constituents about the issue. Residents of York-Simcoe care more about making sure they have good paying jobs, a health care system that works and an education system that helps provide our kids with the skills and good start they need."

She thought he might be trying to deflect the other issues, like the economy, with an announcement like this. "I don't know if it's a trial balloon," Munro remarked.

"Instead of more last minute decisions and one-off letters, Ontarians want a government that makes decisions in a constructive and

productive manner," added Munro. "We will continue to hold the McGuinty Liberals to account on the important issues while still looking for ways to improve the way this place works."

Progressive Conservative leader John Tory wasn't impressed with what the premier is up to either.

He sent a letter to McGuinty last Wednesday, in which he stated the issue "comes somewhat out of the blue."

Tory added the PCs are ready to be part of a committee to address things like this. "It would be better if these things were dealt with on a comprehensive basis,

rather than in a series of one-off letters issued from time to time."

He also stressed the need to "recognize the traditions and history of this place, because I think that is important."

Tory stated removing the Lord's Prayer completely "is completely unacceptable to us.

"Part of respecting the tradition of the legislature is keeping the Lord's Prayer," he added. "That doesn't mean we wouldn't be open to other prayers being added, but a starting assumption that we would eliminate the Lord's Prayer would not be acceptable to us."

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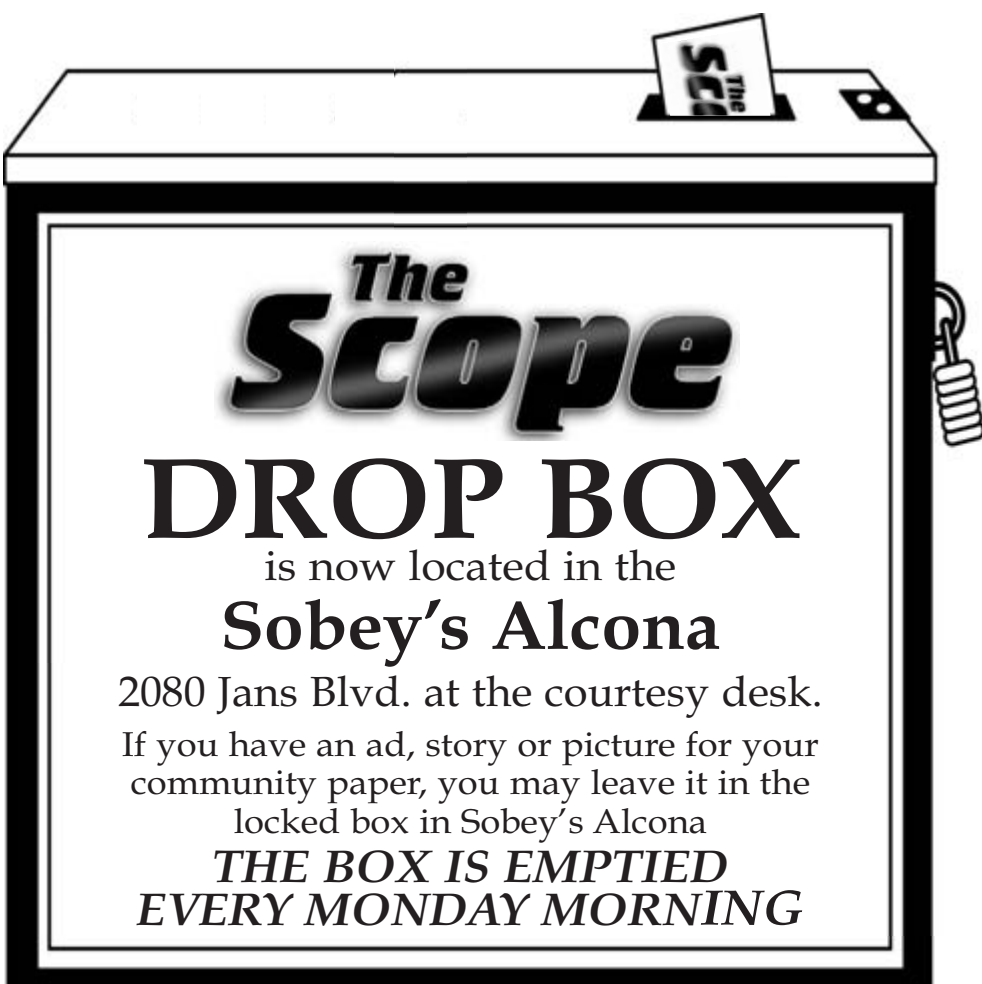
cial display of skulls from the Royal Ontario Museum, watch a puppet show and see reptiles and amphibians from

the Wye Marsh Wildlife Centre.

Registration for March

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