

Dandelions, audits and gay stories keep our readers writing

Paul Russell, National Post

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JUNE 23, 2009 - The safest way to eliminate dandelions is to pull them out by hand.

Members of parliament need to allow our Auditor-General to see how they're spending taxpayers' money. That was the clear message from readers this week. The Post endorsed that sentiment in an editorial. It also invited our honourable members to write to us and let "readers know how you feel about the audit issue."

Despite our pleas, our usually talkative 308 elected representatives remained collectively mute.

But letter-writers were more forthcoming. "This issue is a no-brainer," said Alan Plaxton. "Verification standards for MP expenses are essential; historical precedent supports this fact, as [does] the law. May I suggest you publish the names of those MPs who oppose the Auditor-General's request and keep it for future reference for the next election."

"I feel trapped and betrayed by our politicians," added Anthony Pike. "I believe I can speak on behalf of the majority of Canadians ... We are fed up at the government for constantly failing to read the will of their employer: the Canadian taxpayer."

— "The love that dare not speak its name" is a subject that always draws in lots of letters. A quick search through the electronic letters file finds at least 200 letters have come in over the last month containing the words "gay" or "same-sex." The "gay" stories readers focused on this week included: a male couple in Malawi sentenced to 14 years of hard labour for exchanging commitment vows; the Tories' decision to withdraw funding from Toronto's Pride parade; the Roman Catholic Church's continued opposition to same-sex marriage; and the question of whether U.S. Supreme Court nominee Elena Kagan is a lesbian, and if "her candidacy might suffer if she were."

Reader reaction to these stories roughly breaks down into two camps — the first comprising those who welcome the advancement of gay rights.

"There have been a number of articles in your paper recently about gays, same-sex marriage, etc.," wrote Michael Sweet. "Although I am not surprised that uncivilized nations still refuse to grant equality and freedom to everyone, I am surprised by the hateful remarks constantly put forth by the [Catholic] Church. If denying equality to all

humans, promoting peace and love and respecting civil and human rights is 'un-Christian,' then un-Christian is just exactly what I want to be."

The second camp is predominately made up of readers who oppose same-sex marriage on religious and moral grounds. Many of their letters have been published over the years, with rational arguments and passionate expressions of personal belief being expressed.

A small portion of this latter group want to argue about the "cause" of homosexuality as a biological condition, or to denounce it as a sin, using biblical passages as supporting evidence. But these arguments seem to have become more rare in today's Canada, where same-sex marriage is not only legal, but now unremarkable.

– A common weed (or is it a valuable herb?) became a focal point of lively discussion this past week. Guest columnist Peter Shawn Taylor sparked that dialogue by lamenting Ontario's decision to ban lawn-care herbicides. A surprising number of letter writers took the side of the dandelion in this debate.

"To say there is no convincing scientific evidence that pesticides (and herbicides) are a threat to human health means you don't like the conclusions of numerous studies over decades that say otherwise," wrote Andy Moysiuk. "Spraying lawns is a relic of a generational mindset where conquering the environment, with no sense of the cost, was acceptable. In any event, kids this year will be able to actually know what a butterfly is. Peter Shawn Taylor needs to stop and smell the flowers, perhaps even a dandelion."

"I assumed the column by Peter Shawn Taylor was satire; unfortunately not," added Michelle Fillion. "He sounds like a child who won't take no for an answer [when told] 'No, you can't use pesticides. They're poisonous.' Instead of complaining about dandelions, hire a local kid to pull them. Or just eat the damn things ... They're edible."

Other letter writers said the ban on lawn-care chemicals could have far-reaching implications.

"Peter Shawn Taylor's column was one of the first to focus on the results of this poorly contrived legislation," wrote Martin C. Pick, of Pickseed Canadian Inc. "What really concerns me is that if pesticide banning gains enough momentum, it will [be applied] to agriculture."

– Rex Murphy won praise last week for providing readers with a "dose of cold reality" in his May 15 column, "Giving it back to Ban Ki-moon."

"Rex Murphy gives hope that the purveyors of fluff and fantasy in this world are sometimes taken to task," wrote Charles Reid. "He cuts through the treacle [emitted by] politicians and world leaders alike, with the preciseness of a top surgeon. His style, in complete contrast to the legions who call themselves journalists, is one this reader hasn't experienced since the heyday of David Frost."

"Don't ever quit Rex," Mr. Reid added. "This world needs you, more now, than it ever did in the days of Frost."

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