

Opinion

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CLIMATE

Rising risks from extreme heat require attention

Once upon a time, when Atlantic Canadians heard a weather forecast predicting sunny skies and temperatures reaching 30 C, we often rejoiced at the news, or at least joked among ourselves: “Hot enough for you?” Now that those hot, sunny forecasts seem to be coming more frequently and earlier in the season, we share a sense of dread for risks we never had to plan for in the past.

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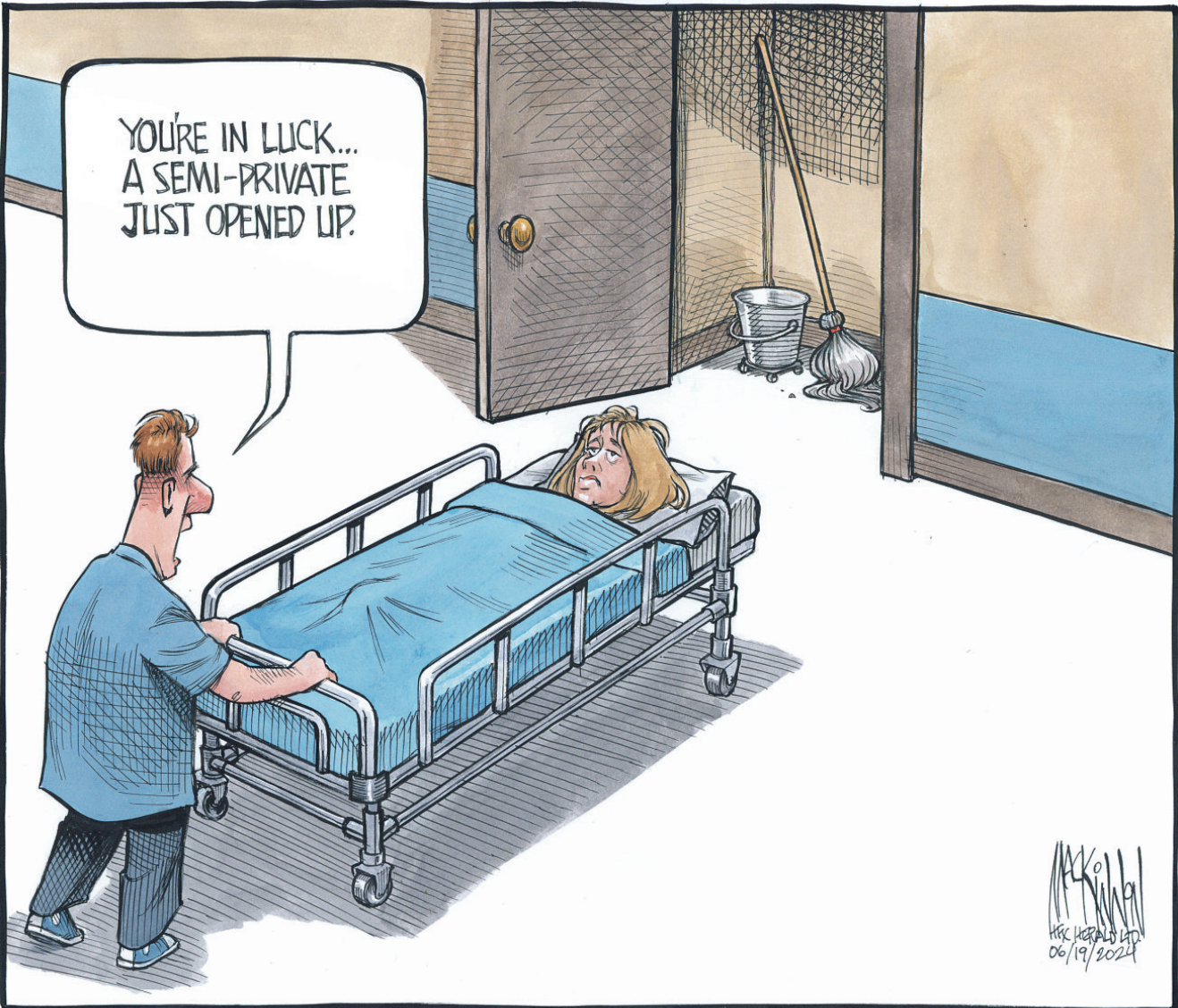
This week, most of the region’s school staff and students are eking out the last lessons of the academic year in sweltering classrooms that aren’t air conditioned and using playgrounds that offer very little shade. A call for better school air exchange systems went out during the COVID-19 lockdowns. The virus is still with us, but the frequency of intensely hot days makes prioritizing good air quality in public institutions like schools and nursing homes a no-brainer. Preparing for rising temperatures, however, is a responsibility for individuals and businesses, as well as the public sector.

TAKE RISKS INTO ACCOUNT

While we often think of the dangers inherent in snowstorms, frigid temperatures or hurricanes and flooding events, extreme heat is the leading cause of illness and death from weather-related hazards, according to Health Canada. During the extremely high temperatures in Western Canada in June and July 2021, the British Columbia Coroners Service reported 569 heat-related deaths in the province. At the time, chief coroner Lisa Lapointe said that 79 per cent of those who died were 65 or older, and many of the deaths were identified as people who lived alone in private residences with poor ventilation. Lapointe’s advice in 2021 can be applied by Atlantic Canadians this week and during future heat waves: “Knowing that our older residents are more vulnerable, we ask that you please look out for family, friends and neighbours, particularly those who are elderly and live alone. Whenever possible, people are encouraged to visit cooler environments, such as cooling centres, malls, libraries and other air-conditioned community spaces, for essential respite from the effects of severe heat.”

CONSIDER LONG-TERM ACTIONS

Municipalities also have a role to play in publicizing where residents can cool down, including air-conditioned and shady public spaces and where to access public drinking fountains. Employers, too, must keep an eye on the weather reports. Flaggers, roofers, bakers and launderers are among workers who can’t escape the heat on the job at the best of times. If temperatures climb toward 40 C, it is beholden upon their bosses to make sure workers can take frequent breaks and have plenty of access to water if they cannot be given the day off altogether. Long-term plans such as air conditioners and green spaces must also be considered. Researchers in B.C.’s Environmental Health Services looking into the 2021 deaths found that a five per cent increase in the tree canopy decreased the risk of death during the heat dome by 10 per cent. After post-tropical storm Fiona in 2022 and wildfires in Nova Scotia and Newfoundland and Labrador, governments must look at replanting. We know it’s “hot enough for you” this week. What are we going to do about it?



BRUCE MacKINNON

VOICE OF THE PEOPLE

URBAN PARK IMPORTANT FOR ENVIRONMENT

Recent events would seem to indicate the proposed urban national park for the Blue Mountain-Birch Cove Lakes Wilderness Area is in limbo. Meetings that were scheduled by Parks Canada have been postponed until the end of the summer. Reports that were supposed to have been completed by now have been delayed. This is not good news for proponents of the urban park, given the pace of development gathering momentum all around its boundaries. The federal Liberals are struggling in the polls and need a big win in Atlantic Canada. Approving the urban national park would certainly go a long way to improving their fortunes, but clearly something is amiss. It could be that the many complicated issues affecting this wilderness area are the reason. There is a highway proposal, which isn’t yet resolved, that could seriously affect the boundaries of the park, if approved. Coun. Pam Lovelace is fighting hard to squash this and has offered an alternate route that seems to make sense. There is also the question of land owners, both large and small, and the process to buy them out. There is a further issue with a key entrance point to the wilderness area that has turned into a political hot potato. There are others, as well, which all together make the case for the federal government to walk away quite compelling. Hopefully, though, the

greater good will prevail and the federal government will work together with other levels of government to make this urban national park happen. It’s too important, environmentally, for our region not to. **John Moore, Halifax**

ELVER QUOTA PLAN DESTINED TO NET MISTRUST
Re: DFO plans to take half the elver quota from commercial harvesters for First Nations (Saturday)
The lesson I take from this is that the government’s proposal is counterproductive to reconciliation. On the contrary, expropriating access to a resource in this way, particularly without consultation, is divisive and more likely to create cynicism and mistrust. The department would do better to arrange for where legitimate Indigenous and non-Indigenous elver fishers could get together, talk turkey away from the microphones and propose solutions that acknowledge the pre-eminent importance of conservation. A side benefit from such get-togethers would be enhanced mutual understanding and respect, which are currently badly needed. DFO and concerned politicians need to get back to Earth. **John Sollows, Yarmouth**

TAXPAYER MONEY SHOULD BE CAREFULLY HANDLED
When a company issues a “good news” statement it is usually about an increased profit. Hopefully, some of it will be returned to shareholders.

Government declarations are usually about new spending. That is the wrong argument. Do they want to encourage us to overspend? Surely an announcement should be about how carefully they are handling the money entrusted to them every year. I want to vote for the person who lets me decide where my excess funds are to go. I certainly cannot support anyone who wishes to support a cause, no matter how worthy, that will require me to pay more in taxes every year. Millions in growing interest payments on government bonds is not the best use of my cash. **Ian McKee, Halifax**

BE THANKFUL FOR MEDICAL SERVICES
Re: N.S. health care stretched too thin (Tuesday)
I am feeling a tiny bit empathetic. I have been hospitalized a few times myself, by ambulance and otherwise, and have had long waits lying on uncomfortable gurneys thinking I would be better off home but needing someone to care for a particular problem or worry. I think of a lot of things but mostly about how lucky we are that we don’t have to pay for the care we do get. I am so grateful to live in this country, where we have free/insured medical services. I think the staffing of our health-care services is first class and they don’t deserve to be complained about. I could not find a helpful suggestion in the entire column. **Betty Morgan, Port Williams**



Hobsons Lake in the Blue Mountain-Birch Cove Lakes Wilderness Area near Bedford.
TIM KROCHAK ■ THE CHRONICLE HERALD