

## THE EDITORIAL PAGE

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## THE NEWSPAPER'S VIEW

## Muzzling scientists offends principle of public service

Governments that depend on public support for their legitimacy and survival wisely recognize that all information is political.

In Canada, our provincial and federal governments spend millions of dollars monitoring the media and trying to influence the coverage they get. Within limits, this is a legitimate use of tax dollars, since governments must communicate with the public.

But when governments try to manage the coverage they get by withholding information that is legitimately in the public realm because that information will be harmful to their partisan political interests, they are no longer acting on behalf of their constituents. This is particularly true with respect to advances in the body of scientific knowledge. Governments employ scientists in a number of fields, conducting research that is used to formulate public policy.

To be useful, that research has to be conducted without respect to whether the outcome will support or undermine policies supported by the government.

Earlier this year, an internal analysis conducted by Environment Canada and obtained by Postmedia News concluded that restrictions imposed in 2007 on scientists by the Conservative government were effectively taking government scientists out of the national debate on climate change.

In March of this year, a communications manager informed scientists at Natural Resources Canada that they must get pre-approval from the minister's office before speaking with journalists.

Postmedia science reporter Margaret Munro discovered that the policy is being applied with bizarre results. A Victoria-based NRC scientist was not able to comment on a study he jointly published with other researchers in April in the prestigious journal *Nature* without first providing a reporter's questions and his proposed responses to the minister's office.

The contentious subject? The article

was about the impact of a colossal flood in Canada 13,000 years ago.

By the time the Canadian researcher got clearance from the minister's office, reporters had long since talked to the British researchers involved in the study and had moved on to other things.

Let's be clear. Governments have a legitimate interest in trying to maintain a consistent message on government policies.

But they perform a disservice if they try to make their job easier by censoring information that may question the underpinning of those policies.

Scientists in the employ of the government are bound by the same limitations of other civil servants when it comes to criticizing their employer. That does not mean, however, that their research findings should be similarly circumspect. Whether their findings support or undermine government policies, they should be considered part of the public record, fully available to the taxpayers that financed their work.

That includes the ability of scientists to speak to the public, directly or through reporters, about their work.

This does not give them license, however, to draw policy implications that are not implicitly inherent in their research. Where there are political conclusions to be drawn, scientists in the employ of the government should leave them to the politicians.

As we have seen with the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, when scientists are tempted to leap to political conclusions, the credibility of their science suffers.

That said, it is crucial that the research by government scientists continues to be published in a timely fashion and that scientists be encouraged to explain to the public what they see as the importance of their work.

If their findings appear to challenge government policy, the response in the public interest would be for the government to reconsider the policy in question, not to gag the messenger.

## GUEST EDITORIAL FROM THE OTTAWA CITIZEN

## Trafficking in people

This Conservative government has never encountered a law-and-order problem that it didn't want to solve with mandatory-minimum sentences.

So it's no surprise that Immigration Minister Jason Kenney has been musing about imposing new mandatory minimums for human trafficking.

It's a facile answer to a complicated problem, a way to score political points and look tough. But there's precious little reason to believe that mandatory minimums would make the slightest bit of difference. We can tinker with sentences all we like; it's moot if the offenders never see the inside of a courtroom.

It's been almost a year since the *Ocean Lady* arrived in British Columbia carrying 76 Tamil migrants. No one involved in that voyage is facing trafficking or smuggling charges. As for the more recent arrival, the *Sun Sea*, the RCMP is still reportedly trying to sort out the perpetrators from the victims — if, indeed, that's an accurate way to characterize the relationship between the passengers and whoever took their money.

There's a blurry line between human smuggling — a consensual if shady business arrangement — and human trafficking, which involves the exploitation and, often, maltreatment, of desperate migrants.

The Criminal Code outlaws trafficking but has nothing to say about smuggling. The Immigration and Refugee Protection Act does, though, make it an offence to "knowingly organize, induce, aid or abet the coming into

Canada of one or more persons who are not in possession of a visa, passport or other document required by this Act." Both trafficking and smuggling carry very heavy maximum penalties, including life in prison.

The problem, clearly, is in enforcing the law. So the government should focus its efforts on finding smugglers and traffickers and making charges stick. Public Safety Minister Vic Toews recently announced a partnership with the Canadian Crime Stoppers Association, which will educate people in Canada about the problem and encourage them to report suspicious activity. The RCMP has also launched an awareness campaign.

Kenney's international work on this file is more promising than his mandatory-minimums idea, if less dramatic. In France, he spoke with his counterpart about ways to undermine the false information spread to potential clients by smugglers. Another focus of Kenney's trip, which includes stops in India and China, is to find more ways to root out immigration fraud, such as marriages of convenience, and prosecute crooked "consultants" who provide fake documents.

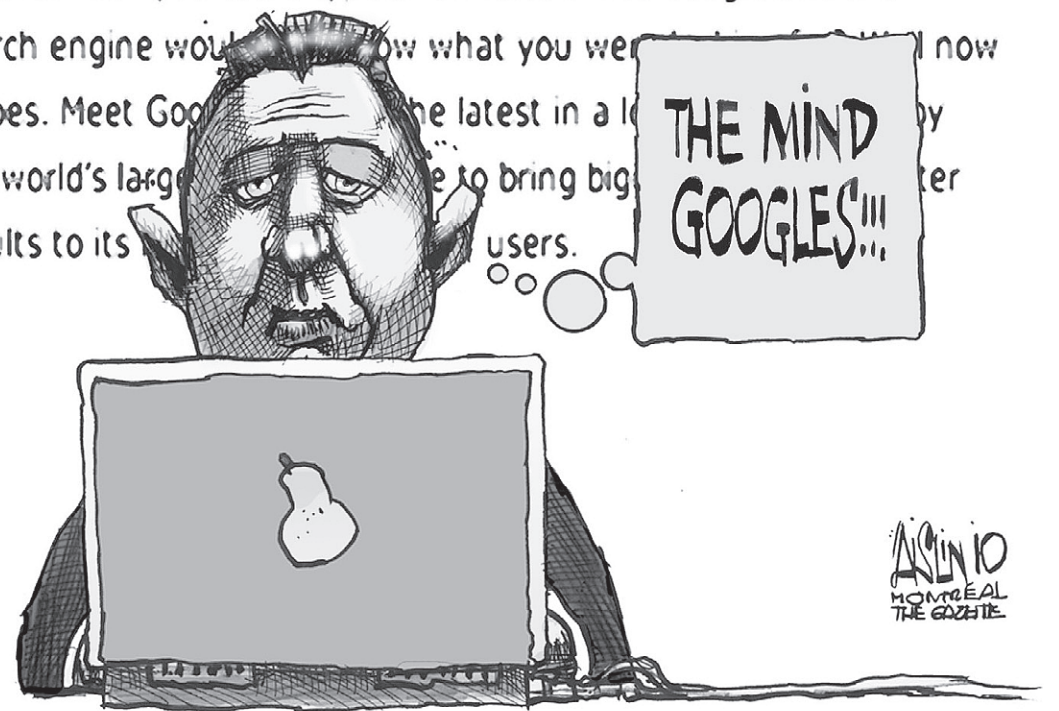
If Kenney wants Canada to get tough with the thugs who exploit migrants, he should focus on finding out why the investigations of both the *Ocean Lady* and the *Sun Sea* are dragging on without any perpetrators being identified or prosecuted. Would-be smugglers and traffickers won't be deterred by amendments to Canada's laws; they'll only be deterred when they see their fellows imprisoned.



## AISLIN'S VIEW

## Google seeks to know what you want before you do

Ever wish you could type a few letters into Google and the search engine would know what you were thinking? Well, now it does. Meet Google, the latest in a line of products from the world's largest technology company, designed to bring big results to its users.



## TODAY'S LETTERS

## Islamic centre for Lower Manhattan a perfect bridge

Oh, my God — or should I say, "Oh my Allah"? So much b.s. has been slung about the "Ground Zero mosque" that I'm standing waist-deep in it. Before I drown — I'm only 4-foot-10 — I think people should stop the chatter and listen.

Among the Americans who died in the 2001 World Trade Center attack were Muslims. These people were Americans who died with other Americans. Let's be clear on that.

Now American Muslims want to be part of the rebuilding process, and why shouldn't they? They were affected; they lost loved ones. Muslims have been part of the American tapestry for decades, but it seems that overnight these Americans have lost their citizenship and are now viewed as Muslims who don't empathize with the families who lost loved ones.

The Islamic centre is a bridge to bring all faiths and all Americans together. Let us not disrespect the spirits of those who have gone by allowing ignorance, pride and ego to get in the way.

**ZEBEEN A. PANJU**  
Port Coquitlam

## Muslims hurt by extremists can't be expected to apologize

Re: *Muslims must stand up and condemn extremism*, Letters, Sept. 13.

The examples cited by the letter writers include the Canadian government apologizing for the anti-Chinese head tax, residential schools and wartime internment camps for Japanese-Canadians. Another writer cited Germans apologizing for the horrors of the Holocaust.

I see a few problems with this position. These were policies and actions condoned or sponsored by governments, whereas I doubt Canadian Muslims even think of terrorists as Muslims. Furthermore, Muslims are more affected by extremism than non-Muslims are. Two mosques in Lahore that were linked to the Taliban were bombed. My good Muslim friend lost family members in this bombing. Do we expect him to apologize for the behaviour of the extremists?

When a Muslim terrorist engages in

an extreme act, he is associated with Islam and we demonize the religion. When Christians engage in extreme acts we separate ourselves from these people and demonize the person, rather than the religion. For example, Terry Jones, who wanted to burn the Koran, was referred to by the media as "the Florida pastor," rather than a Christian pastor.

**MANDEEP DHALIWAL**  
Surrey

## What's in a name?

Has anyone else noticed that would-be Koran-burner Terry Jones is the namesake of Terry Jones, member of the crazed comedy troupe that created the absurd world of Monty Python? Coincidence?

**ROBERT MARTENS**  
Abbotsford

## Give progressive Islam a voice

Re: *Westerners need lesson in religious tolerance: official*, Sept. 11

Thank you, Darah Hansen, for this informative article about Azerbaijan, a progressive Islamic nation in which the first Muslim opera, *Leyli and Majnun*, was composed.

I did not know that and I'm betting a lot of people didn't know. What we need is an opera company willing to tackle this opera and make it well known so everyone will learn that there is such a thing as progressive Islam. Not only do westerners need to know more about a country that doesn't tolerate the extremist brand of Muslim belief but many Muslims themselves need to realize that they have more options than the Osama bin Laden brand, which has hypnotized even doctors and engineers and recruited them to its cause.

I hope to see more exposure of moderate, secular Muslims in the newspapers so readers will realize that not all Muslims are extremists.

**M. SCHOOFF**  
Port Coquitlam

## City council should share its densification vision

Re: *The argument against*

*increasing density*, Letters, Sept. 11

Citizens of Vancouver need to think clearly when considering Jonathan Baker's argument that increasing housing density in Vancouver would threaten its top "livability" rank among world cities. He identified lack of density as a major reason for this ranking. He must be referring to the three-quarters of the city occupied by single-family houses because the density in the remaining quarter (the West End, Yaletown and, soon, southeast False Creek) is quite stunning.

Many people living in these areas have access to parks, beaches and public transportation — all components of livability. Indeed, much of the city's livability may be a result of the fact that it's denser than most North American cities its size. (It doesn't hurt to have a publicly owned seashore.)

Unfortunately, a factor eroding livability is inflated housing costs. While part of the inflation is caused by offshore investment and in-migration, the lack of supply is partly the result of us baby boomers hanging on to our houses in hopes of passing house and garden on to at least one of our children when the time comes. We can put our heads in the sand and try to maintain the "villages of Vancouver" concept (e.g., Dunbar, Renfrew/Collingwood) or we can try to balance the benefits and disadvantages of belonging to the global village.

I believe the current city council has responded as best it can to the intense housing demand. Laneway houses give us boomers a way to bring the next generation back sooner. Because the city can't control in-migration or offshore investment, it would be prudent to densify our "villages" wisely.

I believe that Baker, like many in Vancouver, is reacting to the current lack of certainty over where densification should occur. Vancouver council needs to be clear about where it sees densification making the most sense and then direct the planning department to start the rezoning process. The owners of rezoned land will, of course, reap the windfall of higher land value in exchange for the inconvenience of moving, but how else can it be done?

**COLIN GRAY**  
Former chairman of the  
Dunbar Vision Implementation  
Committee, Vancouver

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