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OPINION

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EDITORIALS

Drop charges in video case

Prosecutors should do the decent thing and drop charges against an Ontario man accused of violating a court order by viewing murderer Paul Bernardo's homemade videotapes of his rape of teenagers Kristen French and Leslie Mahaffy.

The case is likely to lead to the profoundly absurd scenario in which author Steven Williams will be allowed to watch the tapes in order to prepare his defence against the charge of illegally watching the tapes.

This ridiculous conclusion will simply add to the anguish of the girls' families, who were supposed to be protected by a 1995 court ruling that determined only jurors and court officials could see the horrific footage.

Williams was charged after writing a book about the crimes and allegedly intimating that he had viewed the banned tapes. While wilfully turning a blind eye to a possible crime may seem like an abdication of duty, prosecutors will have completely missed the point if in their effort to uphold the ban, their actions actually cause these tapes to be unsealed. The only option in the name of decency is to drop the charges.

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Changing times

It's a measure of how far society has progressed that "first woman" news stories are getting rarer. Women as bus drivers or astronauts, airline pilots or police officers no longer are considered curiosities, even if men still predominate in those occupations. And women are now commonplace in medicine, law and journalism, fields where they were unusual only a generation or two ago.

Even so, the attention surrounding the possible candidacy of Elizabeth Hanford Dole in the 2000 U.S. presidential election shows not only how far women have come in public life in the United States, but also the progress that remains to be made (and not only in the United States).

All too often, it seems, parties seem eager to nominate women for important jobs only when it seems there is little chance of winning.

Gradually, things are improving.

At the moment, polls show that Mrs. Dole is second only to Texas Governor George W. Bush among potential Republican presidential candidates. That should help her raise the millions of dollars necessary to mount a credible nomination campaign.

Robert Dole might just make it to the White House yet.

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The hidden tax

Nickel Belt MP Ray Bonin dismisses any suggestion to change how income taxes are calculated because Canadians, including his constituents, aren't complaining.

He conveniently forgets to take into account, however, that Canadians, including his constituents, aren't complaining because they aren't aware of a hidden tax included in their income taxes. That hidden tax — known as bracket creep — will total \$840 million this year. In four years, that hidden tax will cost Canadians \$3.41 billion.

Canadians, including constituents in the Liberal MP's riding, may have something to say about that. Now would be an appropriate time to raise the issue.

Next month's federal budget offers Finance Minister Paul Martin the opportunity to remove this hidden tax by re-instituting full indexation of income taxes.

Until 1985, tax credits and tax brackets were indexed to inflation. That year, the federal government partially separated tax credits and tax brackets from cost of living levels.

As your income rises into a higher tax bracket, you have to pay more in federal taxes. That's as it should be.

But if your pay increase is on a par with the inflation rate and it pushes you into a higher tax bracket that's wrong. You shouldn't have to pay more in taxes. The purchasing power of each dollar you earn hasn't changed. Therefore, these hidden taxes are eating into your income.

Since 1985, consumer prices have increased by more than 30%. But the growth of the non-refundable credit amounts on tax returns has failed to keep pace with inflation. A recent study by the C.D. Howe Institute says that this means the average Canadian family gives up 2% more of its take-home pay than if full indexation was in place.

Fully indexing income taxes would reduce the amount of income that is subject to taxes — both federally and provincially. When provincial taxes, which are tied to rising federal levies, are added in, the net cost has averaged \$1,000 per family this year, according to the recent study.

This cost could have been even higher had tax rates not dropped over the past seven years. For example, a person earning \$29,590 in 1992 was taxed at 25.6% while a person making the same amount in 1999 will be taxed at 23.1%.

With the federal government expected to declare a surplus in its next budget, there is room to re-institute full indexation. The economic activity created by the increase in consumers' purchasing power would provide tax revenue to help compensate for the drop in federal revenue caused by full indexation.

Sudbury Star



Mailbox: Your Letters

Would you take a 60% pay cut?

Dear sir:

I have not seen a movie since Dec. 11 and will not until the lockout of projectionists ends and their contract is settled.

This would be an easy picket line to cross. There are only four projectionists picketing two theatres. Only four jobs are at stake and they aren't being laid off. They are being asked to take a 60% pay cut. Why bother honouring the picket line?

I've heard people say they make too much, it's an easy job, just change reels. Ask for a tour of the projection area. The projectionist splices the movie upon arrival, splices in the trailers, packages it for shipment. At Famous

Players there are six theatres, six movies to monitor, six computerized projects to program, six bulbs to change. At the Odeon there are three. If something goes wrong, the projectionist has to know how to fix it, fast. Low skill work it is not. Management can run the projectors. Management can also run an oil refinery or a pulp mill with modern technology. But, what about when things go wrong? This is when a tradesman earns his money.

To be a projectionist you must serve a 1,000-hour apprenticeship. No pay. Strictly volunteer. Do you know of any other trade that has to do that? The average projectionist's wages, without overtime, are \$40,000 per year. Via-

com executives apparently make \$7 million each. Remember, there are only four projectionists in town and two theatres to run every day of the year. When projectionists know the contract is up and a lockout is inevitable, they aren't going to move to town, just to wind up walking a picket line miles from their family and friends. Would you take a 60% pay cut? Do you think those executives are going to take a 60% pay cut? Viacom is not losing money.

It's up to you to decide. One picketer, one wage at risk is easy to ignore.

—Cathy Mills
Prince George

Many factors hurt wood industry

Dear sir:

Re: Alan Martin's letter Jan. 21, to me, saying, "how you say the NDP cannot be blamed for the current state of the forest industry defies belief."

First, look at the high stumpage rates. In case you were not aware, there is a large country south of us, the U.S. Their economy is huge, their forest industry protectionist, our dependence on exporting there particularly important. They claimed B.C.'s stumpage rates were so low they constituted unfair subsidy. They lobbied and were able to have counter-vailing duties applied to B.C.'s exports. These duties allowed the U.S. to collect taxes on our products, particularly painful when it causes a decline in sales.

In a trade war, there is nothing we can do to hurt them.

So, after negotiations, we have, surprise, The Softwood Treaty, complete with quotas and high stumpage.

Second, the Forest Practices Code. Have you heard about Greenpeace? They went to bat for our "old growth forests" in Europe. We almost lost the entire European market. It was the desperate introduction of the code, and setting aside old growth for parks that headed off a total boycott of B.C.'s lumber products. Not much point in cutting trees if you can't sell the wood, is there?

Third, high costs. There are numerous third world countries bringing their forests on line for production, their workers paid less for a day of labour than you are an hour. Added to that, there are areas where soil and climate combine to allow a crop harvest in as little as seven years, where it takes 75 years here. Tough to compete against that, isn't it?

There are a lot of external factors stacked against B.C., so before you start trashing, you should do a little research.

—Jay Dumas
Prince George

Treaty is the cheapest deal we'll get

Dear sir:

I write to express my disappoint with the results of the Nisga'a plebiscite. How many of those who voted against this actually read and understood the document, and how many simply voted no in anger at the NDP, or others?

How many who voted "no" understand we are legally bound to negotiate with the Indigenous peoples, and if we don't, the issues will be settled in the courts. How many understand that world opinion will slowly mount against us for continuing to run an apartheid system in Canada?

Most people I've talked to believe the treaty is too generous and think the Nisga'a will

probably mismanage what they get. Yet, this agreement has been worked out over several years by top negotiators. Personally, I believe this treaty is the cheapest deal we are going to get. Going to court could easily increase the final cost by several times.

The most expensive choice is to take the heavy-handed approach and be hard on those we "conquered, raped and stole from." Just ask the English how cheap it has been to support their rich countrymen in Ireland. They have spent billions to maintain something that was wrong and are no closer to a solution. Just ask the South Africans how pleasant their country is. The real fact is that getting

tough and suppressing people simply won't work, and in my understanding of the human spirit, it never will.

For editor Peter Godfrey to say most of us aren't prejudiced or racist is naive. I hear racist comments and jokes quote often. I am ashamed to admit that I have even laughed.

Aristotle once said that for a democracy to work properly, it requires an educated and responsible voting public. When the voter uses his/her emotions, instead of his/her God given intelligence, it is a sad day for B.C. and Canada.

—Peter Ryks
Vanderhoof

Here's a challenge for city council!

Dear sir:

Why does the city not build a permanent homeless shelter? This is a problem we have every winter. It won't disappear and if there are some years when there is little demand, it could be put to other uses.

The cost should not be beyond a city which wants to build a \$6-million art gallery, which has already built an expensive swimming pool, and a Multiplex, which taxpayers will be subsidizing forever. If the city does not already own a suitable site somewhere east of

Queensway, then they should buy one. My guess is there are probably 20 or more builders here who would be willing to put up such a shelter, without months and years of consultations. I would also guess that once such a project is assured, there would be donations of materials, time and labor, plus furniture, bed clothes and other necessities. I have some articles that would be useful.

The shelter would conform to building codes, but no frills or extras — no plans by world famous architects, no wave pool, no

fancy boxes. It would be adequately heated and lighted, but would be strictly utilitarian. Inspection and maintenance costs of such a shelter should be no greater than they are when you improvise from year to year. Mr. Kinsley can make his \$200 donation to an art gallery. I will pledge \$200 for a homeless shelter on the day the work begins and I challenge Mr. Kinsley and each member of Council to subscribe the same amount.

—Elizabeth Sproxtton
Prince George