

OPINION

E-mail: letters@princegeorgecitizen.com



**DEL
LAVERDURE**
Publisher



**DAVE
PAULSON**
Editor

**PRINCE GEORGE
CITIZEN**
Your community newspaper since 1916

A division of Glacier Ventures International Corp.
150 Brunswick Street, P.O. Box 5700,
Prince George, B.C. V2L 5K9 • Fax: 562-7453
Website: <http://www.princegeorgecitizen.com>
Member of the B.C. Press Council

EDITORIALS

Pickton trial doesn't add up

Two criminal trials, similar only for their marathon duration, came to a conclusion this week in Chicago and New Westminster.

In Chicago, disgraced former press baron Conrad Black was given a prison term of six and a half years after being found guilty of plundering his Hollinger newspaper empire, to which this newspaper once belonged, of millions of dollars.

In New Westminster, the jury in the gruesome trial of Robert (Willie) Pickton found the Port Coquitlam pig farmer guilty of second-degree murder on all six counts.

Justice James Williams on Tuesday heard impact statements from family members of Pickton's victims before passing sentencing. The judge set parole eligibility at 25 years, the maximum allowable. Subtracting the almost six years Pickton has been in jail means he can apply for parole in about 19 years. The thought of him ever seeing the light of day is repulsive.

Second-degree murder brings an automatic life sentence, but Pickton could have been eligible for parole in as little as 10 years — a revolting thought given the horrifying nature of the crimes.

It's impossible to fathom, but if Pickton had been given double credit for the six years he has already served, his length of time until parole eligibility would be about nil. That won't happen but you get the picture, and there's something wrong with it.

Back in Chicago, Judge Amy St. Eve announced Black will begin serving his sentence March 3.

Under the U.S. legal system, inmates typically must serve 85 per cent of their sentence before being eligible for parole, meaning Black will spend at least five and a half years in prison.

Black's crimes, too, are serious. He pocketed millions of dollars that belonged to shareholders and he was only the latest in a string of greedy, multimillionaire corporate honchos who were locked up for treating their companies as their personal cash box.

Some observers of the Black trial believe he got off lucky, that six and a half years is too light a price to pay for the crimes he committed.

Perhaps, but if Black's bloodless white-collar crimes are worth 78 months in jail, it's ludicrous that people convicted of second-degree murder are serving even less time.

Even though Pickton was convicted of six counts of second-degree murder, Justice Williams in his sentencing wisely treated him as a first-degree murderer.

Trial observers have said the second-degree murder verdicts were a result of a lot of damning evidence being ruled inadmissible. But to the layperson, the jury's conclusion that Pickton's methodical torturing, killing and mutilating of six women wasn't planned and deliberate is absurd.

So, too, is a system that allows the possibility that a serial-killing monster like Pickton might someday walk free.

— **Editor Dave Paulson**



Premier needs to live up to forest vows

VICTORIA — It has been almost five years since Premier Gordon Campbell announced an ambitious plan to turn around the troubled forest industry and set it on a promising course for the future.

"This is going to be the year of forests in B.C.," Campbell declared. "This is the year we re-establish and revitalize our forest industry."

"We look forward to a future where forestry remains our number one industry — an industry of investment, of jobs, of economic growth and social stability."

That was Jan. 17, 2003. Campbell announced his intentions in a keynote address to the annual convention of the B.C. Truck Loggers Association, representing several hundred coastal logging contractors and haulers.

He's scheduled to deliver a repeat address to the TLA when it convenes again in Vancouver next month.

No word on the theme for 2008. But an honest presentation would begin by acknowledging that, five years after the vaunted "year of forestry," the No. 1 industry is anything but revitalized.

One only needs to consult the recent headlines to see that forestry in B.C. is still a deeply troubled industry. My colleague Gordon Hamilton, forestry reporter for The Vancouver Sun, has become a veritable grim reaper on that score.

"1,800 jobs lost in one month," was the headline on his piece in last Thursday's paper. It detailed pending closures and layoffs in Chetwynd, Williams Lake, Okanagan Falls, Ladysmith, Mackenzie, Fort St. James, Burns Lake and New Westminster.

Other recent Hamilton-authored stories. "Catalyst keeping its Elk Falls machine shut down," Nov. 27. "B.C.'s lumber output on the slide," Nov. 21. "A bleak Christmas to hit forest industry," Nov. 2. "Last sawmill in Terrace shuts down," Oct. 25.



**VAUGHN
PALMER**

In Victoria

One particularly telling report was a Nov. 1 piece headlined: "Real estate sales move to forefront as logging values dim." It noted how forest companies stand to gain more from selling their timberlands for housing development than hanging on for purposes of logging.

Not all of this is owing to the changes associated with the year of forestry.

The Liberals brought in market pricing of timber with a view to improving the flow of wood to more efficient operations. They reformed tenure to make more wood available for communities, natives and smaller operators.

A new forest practices code reduced regulation. Other policy changes eased the closure of unproductive operations.

Controversial as some of those policies were — and the debate was and is vigorous — the effects were swamped by developments beyond the reach of provincial public policy.

The higher dollar and collapsing U.S. housing market have hit the industry hard, making it cheaper to shut down than to continue operating at a loss.

Even if the government were inclined to respond more aggressively, it is limited in its ability to do so by the "standstill" provisions of the last softwood lumber agreement.

Not that there is all that much pressure on the government to mount a rescue effort.

Public opinion, in the urban regions where most voters live, has less exercised than ever

about the fate of the province's largest industry.

This was a year when the blowdown of several thousand trees in Stanley Park generated more expressions of concern than the deaths of millions of trees in the beetle-kill forests of the Central Interior.

It was a year when the Vancouver garbage strike was bigger news than the shutdown of the coastal forest industry.

Daunted by the magnitude of the problems and under little pressure to make dramatic changes, the government has resorted to tinkering, along the lines of the coastal forestry plan.

"Critics slam forest plan," was the headline on Hamilton's Oct. 30 story in The Vancouver Sun, which summed up the impact of a plan that was as long-awaited as it was disappointing.

But for all the obstacles, this is still an issue that demands stronger leadership from the top.

"There's not one person in this room that doesn't understand that we face challenges in forestry," Campbell said in 2003.

"But I also know this: If we work together, if we learn from one another, we'll restore that sense of confidence and excitement in our industry that's critical to the future of every British Columbian."

No less critical today than it was when he said those words. And the nature of the challenge — broad, intractable, crossing ministry and jurisdictional lines — is beyond the reach of the minister of forests working alone.

The premier needs to streamline his overloaded agenda so as to devote his considerable energies to coming up with a better plan to revitalize the province's No. 1 industry.

He could even call it "the Year of Forests — and this time I mean it."

vpalmer@direct.ca

Mailbox:



Your Letters

Latimer's choice leads down a dark path

Re: Latimer's choice (editorial, Dec. 7).

One of the main reasons that the parole board denied Robert Latimer's day parole to a halfway house was because he still has not acknowledged that what he did to his daughter was wrong.

If as a society we think conditions such as Tracy's should be dealt with via death (with the parent delivering the sentence), then we're going down the wrong path.

Don't get me wrong, I support euthanasia in ter-

minal cases with an informed decision by the patient. When you have someone making the decision for you and you have no voice (as Tracy did), you're getting into a non-grey area. It shouldn't be done.

If you say this was done by a loving parent, what of the other parents across Canada who are dealing with their children who are in worse medical shape than Tracy Latimer? Are they justified, out of love, to end the lives of their family members? If you carry out the logic of this editorial to the end, then

they are. Somehow I think that if this trend started, people would examine how people with disabilities are viewed in society and how they are supported.

To say that Robert Latimer ended his daughter's life out of love is somewhat incorrect. In police transcripts from their interviews with him, he admitted to considering shooting Tracy. In some reports the Latimer family was shown to have rejected some of the surgical options that would have reduced the pain that Tracy was feeling. And in the trial, some

doctors gave evidence that Tracy's pain would have been treatable.

I wouldn't want to be in the position where the only option you felt you had was to end your daughter's life. Perhaps the Latimers didn't receive the supports they needed to raise their daughter.

Robert Latimer received the correct sentence. Mr Latimer was the author of his own parole board decision.

— **Myles Huble, Prince George**

Advocating the parent's right to smoking 'cause for concern'

Re: Policing people's kids (letter, Dec. 10).

Apparently Ms. Paolucci has, against all odds, avoided the enormous amount of information warning the public of the devastating effects of smoking and second-hand smoke since the Surgeon General's Report on Smoking and Health in 1964.

Smoking in a car with children is not analogous to feeding your children McDonald's or allowing them to play Xbox.

It is exposing them directly to known carcinogens.

Why any parent would expose their children to cancer-causing agents is beyond me, and advocating for the right to do so is outright cause for concern.

When children are exposed to second-hand

smoke they have been shown to have reduced lung function, increased episodes of asthma and reduced oxygen flow to tissues. It has also been linked to sudden infant death syndrome, cancers and leukemias in childhood, slower growth, and adverse neuro-behavioural effects, among a host of other illnesses.

Ms. Paolucci is right about one thing; we do have a long way to go with regards to the health of children. However, I would suggest that removing a known carcinogen from their environment as opposed to a fatty food or video game is probably a better start.

We apparently also have a long way to go with regard to parental education.

— **Sean Henderson
Prince George**

Palmer right on child advocate

Re: Child advocate feels wrath of Liberals (Vaughn Palmer column, Dec. 7).

I don't always agree with everything Vaughn Palmer writes but he was spot on in his assessment of the government's vindictive attack on the child advocate.

This government's record on all issues affecting our children is an ongoing embarrassment to all British Columbians.

If the events leading up to the Hughes report and the recent child death inquest here in Prince George hasn't instructed our government on its mismanagement on child protection, it simply is not going to happen with these people in charge.

Have a complaint about how we gather or present news? If talking with senior editors or the publisher doesn't resolve it, contact the B.C. Press Council, which examines complaints from the public about the conduct of the press in gathering and publishing news. The Citizen is a member. Your written concern, accompanied by documentation, should be sent to: The B.C. Press Council, 201 Selby Street, Nanaimo, B.C. V9R 2R2.