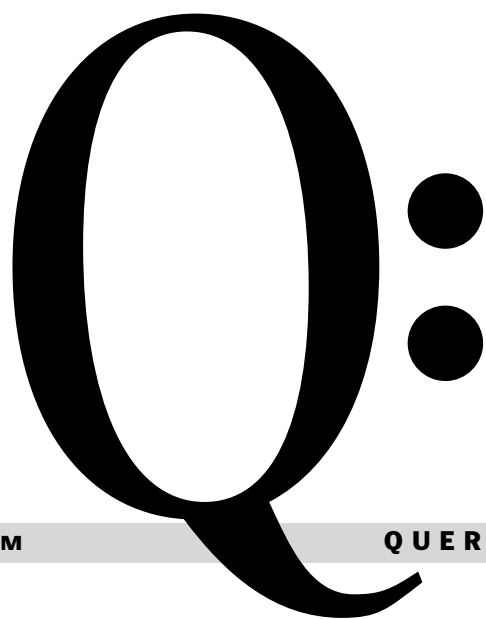


I haven't heard anyone say that the Taliban can be defeated and nor do I believe that that's possible.



NDP Leader Jack Layton



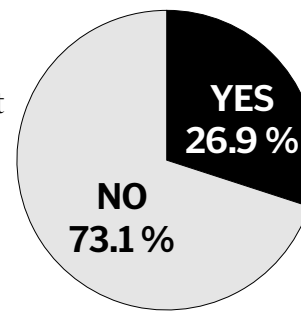
TOMORROW:

Where are all the leaders?

Today's calibre of candidates for political office — internationally and locally — leaves considerable room for improvement, especially when our societies need leaders whose vision extends beyond the ballot box and getting re-elected. **Paula Arab** offers her theories on why politics fail to attract the good people.

PREVIOUS QUESTION

We asked if Calgarians are too gloomy about life in their city. Here's how 519 of you responded:



Today's question

Do you think the economy is headed for a downturn?

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THURSDAY, JANUARY 3, 2008 A11

INBOX
YOUR SPACE • YOUR TIME

Ghostbuster

Re: "Millions of Canadians think they're haunted," Dec. 30.

Of course, following years of "research," Barbara Smith, author of numerous ghost stories, has found "there is something out there we don't understand."

However, I would think she has also discovered it would be quite detrimental to her bottom line if she were to solicit the aid of a psychologist to show her what anyone who has taken a first year undergraduate course should know — that the mind has a fascinating ability to turn natural occurrences into something that can be perceived as supernatural.

Other scientists could easily explain the physical happenings through much simpler theories based on evidence, not faith in the supernatural. As for the 2.5 million Canadians, employing a little skepticism would go a long way toward living a life based on reality instead of faith in that which is not supported, nor beneficial.

The real world has so many wonders to discover that are infinitely more interesting and surely vaster than the childish stories concocted by those who feel they need something else to justify their existence or keep their minds occupied. The "something we don't fully understand" is our natural world and our humble place in it. The research needed is to find out more about it, not fill the holes with sophism and faith.

Eric Mathison, Calgary

Reason rules

Re: "Prayer or silence not offensive," Editorial, Dec. 30.

I have the impression that your editorial board is not really offended by the action of one atheist, but is instead intent on perpetuating stereotypes — in this case of atheists. The accusation that atheists appear to be the angriest people in western society is laughable at the least and alarming at the most. I am an atheist and served my country for 28 years so that all citizens (not just the "majority") can speak out for their rights.

I, too, am disturbed that someone would put forth such a trivial lawsuit; however, the notion that all godless people cannot tolerate the practice of others leaves your readers with the false impression that atheists cannot tolerate others, including people of faith.

We can and we do so on a daily basis. Atheists are free thinkers. There are thousands of causes atheists believe in.

To answer your final rhetorical question: "Are we afraid there just might be a God after all?" — no. How can one be afraid of something which does not exist?

Ben Cyr, Airdrie

Not built to last

Re: "U of C focused on expansion, not maintenance," Emily Senger, Opinion, Dec. 30.

It sickens me to hear that now U of C dorms and other buildings possibly need to be torn down due to their state of disrepair. First it was SAIT (several months ago); now it's U of C, and I am sure there are more places in town that could be included in this category.

I come from Poland, where buildings were built to stay and not to be demolished within one generation. It would have to be a major disaster or a city public project that would cause a building to be taken down. What makes us build something here that we know from Day 1 that will go down soon?

Why do we build things in this manner? Shall we blame consumerism and disposable society for all this?

Stan Majcherkiewicz, Calgary

YOU SAID IT BEST

Each day, a letter that expresses a view particularly well is featured on Q. Each month, one outstanding letter will be chosen for a special prize.



Courtesy, London Sun, Herald Archive

Kate Middleton, seen here with Prince William, would make a great queen, says reader.

She'd make a jewel of a queen

Re: "Possible queen has humble roots," Dec. 31.

Kate Middleton, you are in good company. William the Conqueror, the illegitimate son of William I of Normandy, was descended from Rollo, a minor chieftain in the band of Viking raiders who besieged Paris in 885. Despite his relatively humble roots, Rollo was able to fight, threaten and connive his way to the position of Duke of

Normandy in 911. The rest is commonly known history.

There is nothing particularly noble about European nobility or any nobility, for that matter. It's all a matter of using cunning and betrayal, usurping of power and constant fighting to ward off other usurpers. I think this myth surrounding class distinctions needs to be discarded.

It's a fabrication perpetuated by those who have managed to

grab power for themselves.

Why anybody would see Middleton's humble roots as a handicap to becoming queen is beyond me. It's an effete monarchy, one in dire need of some fresh blood and a rejuvenation of spirit that can only come from someone who has not been constantly pampered and fed from a silver spoon.

Peter Mannistu, Calgary

Well done, Ralph

Re: "U of C student housing in dire shape," Dec. 17.

Score one for disaster economics. The Klein government cut back money to universities, and therefore the universities cut back on building maintenance and the management personnel to maintain buildings. Voila, there is a crisis for student housing. The student residences are falling apart because they have not been well maintained. Now the university will be forced into having a P3 arrangement with private enterprise to build or repair the buildings. The Klein and Conservative government's plan to eliminate good government and management of public funds and services is working well.

The university will have to pay more money out to private enterprise for a poorer quality service. Private sector wins. Taxpayers Albertans lose.

Margaret McLeod, Calgary

Help us out

Re: "No fun," Letter, Dec. 29.

I was disappointed to read of Helen Paris's rating of four out of 10 on her visit to Heritage Park's 12 Days of Christmas. I am a volunteer at Heritage Park. Almost without exception, I found visitors to be happy with their experience. It seems unreasonable to think that rides and water wheels are expected to be open during the dead of winter.

However, what perplexes me even more are Paris's expecta-

tions overall. I wonder how she feels about paying \$10 to \$12 for Stampede admission when almost everything else you do there costs more money. I also don't think she understands that Heritage Park events and programs are mostly staffed by volunteers. I wonder if she has considered volunteering her time to make the experience more enjoyable for everyone. Heritage Park is chronically short of volunteers and sometimes even those who have made commitments fail to show up for their booked shifts. For example, the maze and skating rink games that were planned for this year's 12 Days of Christmas were unable to be open because there were not enough volunteers to man these venues. As usual, there are some people who expect the best of everything for little cost. Perhaps rather than complaining, Paris should consider returning to Heritage Park and offer up some of her time.

Sandy Pierson, Calgary

Bookworms

Re: "One-third of nation doesn't read books," Jan. 2.

They took the numbers from year-to-year sales. If this is the only source they used, their numbers are way out. What about people like me who get their reading material from the library? I read three or four books a month. My three grandchildren get lots of books out of the library, as do a lot of my friends. Does Ipsos Reid take this into account?

Joel Duncan, Calgary

I would think more people borrow books than buy them.

June Reid, Calgary

True meaning

Re: "Tories drop GST to five per cent," Jan. 1 and "Consumerism foils Grinch from stealing Christmas," Licia Corbella, Opinion, Dec. 22.

Isn't it quite a stretch for Licia Corbella to assert that consumerism is saving Christmas? Rather, consumerism is emptying Calgarians' hearts and wallets. The idea that stuff brought from the malls and supermarkets can buy love from your friends and family while enhancing one's relationship with one's God seems ridiculous. Consumerism, as a new form of religion for Stephen Harper's Conservatives, was given a big boost when the GST was reduced to five per cent under the guise of a tax cut. Tax cut for whom? The wealthy. Respected economists have pointed this silly gimmick out to the Conservatives.

Methinks they're hoping to buy some votes from us in the coming federal election. Love, time and a listening ear are what people need to give one another at Christmas. All the trinkets and toys a plastic card can buy tend to be quickly forgotten if you won't give yourself to be with your loved ones. Christmas, in addition to its religious dimension, is about building community and connections with friends and family.

URBAN PLANNING

Pace of growth important, but it's form that counts

JIM DEWALD AND BEV SANDALACK
FOR THE CALGARY HERALD

Recently, there has been both positive and negative commentary regarding an apparent slowing pace of growth in Calgary.

Even Calgary's economic development agency views such a slowdown as a good thing. This might seem counterintuitive, but it is an easy idea to support because skyrocketing housing costs, such as the 55 per cent increase in the median single-family home price from November 2005 to June 2006, and the persistent labour shortages of the past year, are clearly unsustainable.

The end had to come, and likely the longer we wait, the harder we fall.

Still, in the long term, even the pundits and critics agree that our wealth of natural resources virtually guarantees that Alberta will grow and prosper. As a consequence, we feel that a slowing pace is the ideal, and even the critical time to consider more than just the pace of growth. We need to take time to focus diligently on the more permanent impact of how we grow, or what form growth should take.

Form will remain with us forever, while pace comes and goes. Plus, the form of the city is strongly related to the quality of life that we might enjoy. Developments that have a greater mix of uses, a higher intensity, and a focus on the public realm are far superior in providing us with walkable, livable neighbourhoods that have some possibility of evolving a sense of place.

From a financial perspective, countless studies have been done on the sustainability of conventional North American suburban growth models. Chief among the experts is Prof. Robert Burchell of the Center for Urban Policy Research at Rutgers (New Jersey). Burchell and his research team have confirmed that significant infrastructure cost savings are available by adopting form-based development models rather than land-use zoning models that disperse our daily activities into isolated single-use pods. Further, the savings in ongoing operating costs are even more significant and lasting.

Indeed, our mayor was recently quoted in the Calgary Herald as supporting new approaches to growth management because unbridled spread simply strains our city's resources too much.

When considering the current debate on the work plan for the city's planning department, Dave Bronconnier stated that "this is very much about the cost of growth."

The current unsustainable patterns of growth are institutionalized and deeply embedded in the city's approval and development processes and daily routines. They need to change, but how?

The shift from the current development patterns requires much more than incremental improvements in density; more than extending the odd light rail transit line here or there; more than the odd mixed-use development project or dispersed and unrelated transit-

oriented development nodes.

All of these approaches have been tried, and leave us with the same challenges. Unless they are part of a more comprehensive change in approach, they will just be too little and too late. We need a complete

shift in the fundamental aspects of development — a thorough change in the understanding and acceptance of patterns for urban growth.

Unfortunately, people resist change, even truth-based change.

New ideas always have difficulty catching on — for instance, it took until the mid-1800s for most people to accept that the world is not flat. For centuries, bathing was considered unhealthy and the cause of disease. History is replete with such old "truths" that are disproved, but still behavioural

change is resisted.

These are examples of scientific revolution; what philosopher Thomas Kuhn termed paradigm shifts, or points at which collective values and ideas change. While it might seem absurd to compare whether the world is flat with growth patterns for a city, the common thread is a resistance to the need for changing perspectives and behaviours in the face of new and better information. Make no mistake, there are many who will resist new growth patterns if for no other reason than because it is a change from what they know.

We applaud the city planning department for taking on the need for a paradigm shift with the bold initiative called Plan It. Sure, skeptics will argue that this is a continuation of a long string of planning documents from the Go Plan to sustainable suburbs, transit-friendly design guidelines, and more recently imagineCalgary. But we feel Plan It holds more promise for a very important reason — the city seems

willing to shift resources from regional and area-specific planning to address fundamental change through the Plan It scenarios.

Plus, there are three other critical contributors this time — (1) the infrastructure engineers are singing the

same tune, crying that our current patterns of growth are financially unsustainable, (2) Bronconnier is placing his sizable influence and leadership behind this initiative, and (3) Calgary society is shifting to prefer more sustainable patterns of development.

Now is the time for a true paradigm shift, and it is a tremendous opportunity for Calgary to demonstrate the type of leadership that can catapult us well beyond the dreams of other North American auto-centric metropolitan jungles. It is time to seize the day, seize the opportunity, and truly buy into new patterns of growth well before the next boom overwhelms us.

JIM DEWALD, PHD, IS ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF STRATEGY AT THE HASKAYNE SCHOOL OF BUSINESS, UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY, AND BEV SANDALACK, PHD, IS PROFESSOR AND CO-ORDINATOR OF THE URBAN DESIGN PROGRAM AT THE FACULTY OF ENVIRONMENTAL DESIGN, UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY. THEIR URBAN DESIGN COLUMN APPEARS ON SATURDAYS IN THE CALGARY HERALD HOMES SECTION.



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