

## INDEPENDENT EDITORIAL

# Ontario's Beer Stores in need of a 21st century makeover

The Ford government is once again considering the end of Ontario's Beer Stores. According to the Toronto Star, there is no intention of renewing the 10-year Master Framework Agreement, which imposes stringent restrictions on the sale of beer in Ontario venues other than the designated retailer.

The Ford government has less than a month to commit to a new contract or not. The current agreement expires in 2025. However, it's high time for Ontario to move on from this archaic business model that has been around for far too long.

Founded in 1927, The Beer Stores in Ontario are thought to be the sole foreign-owned oligopoly controlling the retail sale of beer in Canada's food industry. This is quite peculiar when you consider it. The Beer Stores operate 420 stores throughout the province, have eight distribution centres, and employ almost 7,000 people.

This chain is primarily owned by Molson, Labatt, and Sleeman, with a few smaller breweries owning stakes in the chain. In fact, many Ontarians believe that Beer Stores are government-owned because that's the impression they often get when visiting one of them. Going to a Beer Store in Ontario feels as mundane as buying bread in Europe during the Great War – devoid of personality or excitement and downright boring.

The Beer Store chain doesn't have to be eliminated. For one, in the current flawed system, only the Beer Store can sell some discounted cases. Eliminating this restriction would have a significant impact on competition and create a more level playing field. It would give more options to consumers. Also, it wouldn't hurt to redecorate stores and make them more inviting. Right now, some of them just look like a prettied-up warehouse.

Ontarians have also enjoyed the luxury of returning bottles to the same place of purchase. Perhaps, beyond 2025, Beer Stores could also play a role by continuing to accept beer bottles while the province figures out a different method to preserve the necessary green logistics to support a recycling strategy. Again, other provinces have figured out different systems. Surely, Ontario can come up with a new plan.

Changes are long overdue because of the countless small, local microbrewers who struggle to secure any shelf space at the Beer Store due to the dominance of a retail distribution oligopoly. These microbrewers need recognition and support so that market access in their own province is not an issue. It's a straightforward decision that would benefit both consumers and those who foster job creation.

But ultimately, this outdated model has become obsolete and hinders the free and competitive beer market. For consumers in Ontario, it's time to modernize and open the beer market in Ontario. Free the beer!

*Dr. Sylvain Charlebois is senior director of the agri-food analytics lab and a professor in food distribution and policy at Dalhousie University.*

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## BARRHAVEN Independent

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# Paper straws really suck... barely

Do you remember the first time you were exposed to the now common paper straw?

For me, it was at the drive-thru at A&W. Maybe I am a bit cliché, but I love to have an ice cold root beer to go with my sodium-licious cheese burger and mammoth salty onion rings.

I know that sounds a little venomous, but I don't care how salty or sodiomy they are. I love A&W burgers and especially their onion rings.

It's a very predictable loop from the big board to the speaker to the screen. What am I going to get?

Why do I bother looking?

I get the same thing every single time.

I scan the board up and down a few times over. Then I order a Mozza Burger with onion rings and a large root beer.

"We don't have large root beer, only regular," comes the voice through the speaker.

"Why?" is always my reply. "Don't you know that everyone wants a large root beer?"

Then I realize that the teenager wearing the head set whose voice is coming through the speaker does not make those decisions. So I try a different method of making my point.

"Um excuse me," I ask after finally deciding on the Mozza Burger and onion rings with a regular root beer. "Is this order being monitored for customer service purposes?"

"What?"

"You know, is someone at head office listening to us?"

"I don't know," came the reply. "Not that I know of."

"Okay, I thought maybe if they were they could start selling large root beer."

"You can always buy two root beers," came the voice on the speaker.

"I can't do that," I said sarcastically. "One, it's not the same. Two, that would mean I would get two straws, and when they end up in the ocean I would probably kill two sea turtles instead of one sea turtle."

"Sir," the teenager replied. "We don't use plastic straws anymore."

"You don't?"

"No sir, we have paper straws now. We just started this month."

I thought about it for a minute, and then I became confused. How on earth could paper straws be a good thing. In rock-paper-scissors, soft drink beats paper every single time.

"Who's the ham and egger who came up with that stupid idea?" I asked.

"Who's the what?"

"Oh yeah, I'm at A&W. Who's the bacon and egger who came up with that?"

"Who's the what?"

I paused for a minute.

"Are you sure this transaction is not being recorded for customer service purposes?"

es?"

"Not that I know of, sir."

"Okay, just one root beer with a paper straw to go with my meal."

"Please drive around."

I got my lunch, found a parking spot, put on Kenny Chesney's No Shoes Radio on Sirius XM, and at my Mozza Burger and onion rings. After a few bites, it was time to sip on my root beer.

I put my lips to the paper straw and had a sip.

The straw did not really destroy the taste of the best root beer in the world, but the texture of the straw on my mouth really threw me off. It's been a couple of years of paper straws served with lunch, and I still can't get past it.

I took my time nursing my regular size root beer that was not big enough. The straw seemed to be softening and it was harder to get the root beer through.

"This is nasty," I thought. "How can they ruin my root beer with the stupid paper straw? Why not just give me a plastic straw and if it kills a sea turtle, well, maybe that will be collateral damage."

Then I thought about what I just thought. What kind of an awful person am I? I can't kill a sea turtle just because I think paper straws are inefficient and somewhat disgusting.

"What if my straw kills a dolphin?" I thought. "I like dolphins more than sea turtles. And if you kill a dolphin, it might end up in the nets with the tuna, and then you are getting some dolphin in your can of tuna, all because I would have been so selfish to use a plastic straw."

And then I wondered if the dolphin is caught in the tuna net and choking on a plastic straw, which was probably mine, would the sea turtle swim by and make fun of him?

"I've got to stop thinking about this stuff," I told myself. "I want to listen to Kenny Chesney. I don't want to listen to me."

As my drink went on, the taste of disintegrating paper was competing with the delicious flavour of my root beer. Finally, I just gave up and tossed the lid –and straw into the bag and drank out of the cup. The lid is plastic by way, and the round shape could probably get caught in the larynx of a seal.

Alright I just made that up, but it could. Or could it? I don't even know what a larynx is, and I am not sure if seals even have them.

Surely there is a better option than paper out there. It was a good try, but definitely a failed bit.

As I drove away from A&W, and my mouth still tasted funny from my first paper straw experience, I could only think of one thing.

'I should have ordered two.'

### FROM THE OTHER SIDE

Jeffrey Morris



## INDEPENDENT EDITORIAL

# Tragedy always brings out the best in Barrhaven

Here we are again.

We are back to that dark place of shock after a horrific tragedy. We are left asking questions, and looking for answers that either don't exist or are not good enough.

The day of Wed., March 6 was filled with record warmth and sunshine. Shockingly, the day turned into the darkest, coldest night Barrhaven has ever seen.

Over the last 20 years, the tragedies that this community has absorbed is inconceivable.

We go back to September 2004, when Jennifer Teague was abducted and murdered after working her shift at Wendy's. The teenage girl took a bus to a convenience store at Jockvale and Tartan and met her friends for a late night dart before walking home along a path to her home on Kennevale. She was abducted and eventually killed.

Michael Swan, a popular kid with an infectious smile, was executed in his home in 2010. A friend of his helped set the robbery up, knowing that Swan, a former Double-A hockey player, had some cash and a bag of weed in the house he was renting with friends. Swan did not co-operate with the robbers. He was shot and killed.

In 2015, the community was again horrified when Jagtar Gill was violently killed in her home while she rested on the family couch recovering from abdominal surgery. Gill's husband, Bhupinderpal Gill, and his alleged lover, Gurpreet Ronald, were both charged with murder. The court found that Gill and Ronald, both OC Transpo employees, planned the killing.

In 2021, Conor Donnelly was charged with killing his mother, Linda Frederick, in Barrhaven.

In between the murders, there were tragic accidents. St. Mother Teresa student Cisco Williams was killed in a street racing crash on Beatrice Drive just hours after writing his last high school exam. Eric Leighton died in an explosion in shop class at St. Mother Teresa High School. In 2013, an OC Transpo bus and a VIA train crashed in Barrhaven, leaving six dead.

Those are some of the fatal accidents the community has mourned through. There have been several more. We mourned them all.

The name Wickramasinghe will forever be remembered in our community.

We need to ask ourselves, what will that name mean to us?

The name Wickramasinghe should remind us to hug your kids, and hug your spouse. Dhashuni Wickramasinghe lost his wife and four children, as well as a close friend in the attack. He will have physical scars from surviving the attack, but the emotional scars will never heal. He would give anything to jug his family just one more time.

Although we may not know him, now is the time for us to step up in the community and show love and compassion to a neighbour who has lost everything important in his life.

It's what communities do, especially Barrhaven.

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## Why did they take so long?

I remember where I was when man walked on the moon.

I remember where I was when Paul Henderson scored.

I remember where I was when I heard that Elvis died, and when John Lennon was shot and killed.

I remember where I was when I heard the McRib was coming back.

I was watching TV and I saw the commercial. As soon as the narrator said "the four greatest words in the English language", I knew what he was talking about.

The McRib. Is. Back.

Yes, the McRib came back for a limited time. I stopped what I was doing, staring at the huge McRib on my giant screen in some sort of Pavlov's Dog-like trans. I salivated. On cue, my stomach growled.

'I have to get one,' I thought. 'I've got to drive to McDonald's. It's 12 minutes away, and it's in Walmart. That's not far. It might be my last one ever. What am I thinking? I'm hungry. I'm getting two.'

I got to McDonald's, ordered on the big giant employee-replacing tablet, and waited anxiously like a kid at the front of the line at the mall when Santa decides to take a pee break just before it's his turn.

But a McRib. This was better than Christ-mas. This is the sandwich that I grew to love through my teenage years and beyond. It was perfect. As I would say when I was at Carleton, it was sandwich adroitness bordering on superfluity. I spent a lot of money to go to school there just to learn words like that. If only I knew then that I would only use expensive words when the McRib was back.

The McRib was developed by McDonald's executive chef Rene Arend in 1981. He is from Luxembourg. Arend also invented the Chicken McNugget. He may be the most influential creator in quick service restaurant history.

Chicken McNuggets became so popular that other QSR chains quickly rolled out their own versions. As a result, there was a chicken shortage in the food supply chain. The McRib was an alternative. Arend said the sandwich would have been cheaper and easier to produce if it was a round patty on a hamburger bun. But he is an executive chef. He wanted the McRib patty to look like a rack of ribs on a bun. It even had ridges. I wonder if anyone ever thought they would think there were bones in the sandwich and that they would chip their teeth? I guess when people say, 'there is no such thing as a stupid question,' we just blew up that theory.

The McRib patty is made from restructured ground pork shoulder. Meat restructuring was a process developed by the US Army to deliver low-cost meet to its troops in the field. The process was not patented, and McDonald's used the work of meat scientist Roger Mandigo, who had been funded by the National Pork Producers Council.

Using Mandigo's techniques, McDonald's developed the McRib patty using small flakes of pork shoulder meat.

The McRib has come and gone, and come and gone again. Rarely does it appear in Canada. We waited for a decade. When it goes away, I don't think I can wait another decade. They make Shamrock Shakes an annual thing. Why can't they make the McRib an annual thing?

After my McRib sandwiches, I went back home. When I got in the car, I adjusted the mirror. I noticed I had McRib sauce smeared all over my face. I looked at my hands. They were covered in McRib sauce. It was under my finger nails. It was on my wrists. It was everywhere.

I was at Walmart. Why didn't I get a shower curtain and rubber boots to wear while I was eating?

I took a deep breath through my nose. I may have had McRib sauce up my nose too.

'I'm basically wearing McRib cologne,' I thought to myself. 'Why don't they have that? What if Old Spice made McRib Body Wash?'

That one was absolutely not a stupid question.

When I got home, I knew what I was in for.

"Look at yourself!" the Diva said, in disbelief yet not in disbelief. "Seriously. Just lookatcha. Of course you would come home covered with McRib sauce. I will do a laundry, and I want you to go have a shower because you're not going to bed smelling like a McRib."

So much for the cologne idea.

As I was in the shower, my mind wandered. Why don't they call it Canadian rib like they call the ham on an Egg McMuffin Canadian bacon? More people would want it.

I thought to myself some more. My favourite food at McDonald's, besides the McRib, is the McGriddle breakfast sandwich.

Has anyone at McDonald's ever thought how incredible it would be to have little round McRib patties smeared in McRib sauce and put them in a maple McGriddle sandwich bun?

That would be incredible.

In the meantime, I will be at Home Depot looking at freezers.

"Blah blah blah," the salesman will say.

"That's nice," I would reply. "So how many frozen McRib sandwiches will it hold?"

Unfortunately, the McRib promotion is over. I am heartbroken. I never did get my freezer full of sandwiches. When will it be back? I can't deal with this. Why did they take it away from me?

Those cruel McBastards.

By the way, did you hear that Tim's brought back the blueberry fritter?!?

### FROM THE OTHER SIDE

Jeffrey Morris



## INDEPENDENT EDITORIAL

# High youth unemployment needs our full attention

The school year has begun, and many young people are likely making some hard financial decisions right now. Youth unemployment hit 14.2 percent in July – the highest rate seen since September 2012 outside the pandemic years of 2020 and 2021.

The youth employment rate has been worsening for a year, dropping by four percentage points since last summer. Among full-time students, the decline was even larger – almost seven percentage points. This represents a loss of 112,000 jobs among students in just a year.

A very large group of young workers are bearing the brunt of the economic slowdown caused by high interest rates, competing for a limited number of openings not only among themselves but with older, more experienced workers as well.

Given strong population growth, especially among young people, the labour market is simply not growing fast enough to absorb new entrants.

Young people have just come through the huge disruptions associated with the pandemic and are now facing sky-high rents, tuition and food costs.

The inflation rate may be easing this summer, but the lines at food banks haven't. Food banks and community pantries are now permanent fixtures on campuses across the country, serving students with no money left after covering rent and tuition.

The situation of international students is particularly acute. These students come to Canada on the hook for a massive tuition bill (typically more than four times higher than the equivalent Canadian student) only to find that the cost of living is much higher than they expected. As a result, many are living in appalling conditions.

The depth of this generational crisis is staggering. Compared to previous generations, young adults are facing a future of lower earnings and more employment precarity, further burdened with high levels of debt.

Young people's experience in the summer of 2024 clearly demonstrates that governments, post-secondary institutions, and employers need to do much more – not only to make education more affordable but to tackle the surge in youth unemployment and the growing divide between good jobs and bad jobs.

In our economic system, there are winners and losers. At this moment, the economic elites are throwing young people under the bus, collateral damage in efforts to rein in inflation and reassert neoliberal economic orthodoxy that delivers extraordinary wealth to the rich.

The systemic underfunding of post-secondary institutions has compounded this difficult situation as schools have turned to international students to fill funding shortfalls – opening the door to precarity and abuse.

Make no mistake. As the baby boom generation retires, Canada will need to rely on the next generation of workers – those who were born here and the many we welcome from abroad. This is precisely the time we need to invest in young people and their futures.

*Katherine Scott is a senior researcher with the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.*

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## What you cannot bet on at Future Hard Rock Casino

While the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Commission has reigned in control of gambling and online betting, we have decided to let you know the things that you CAN'T wager on at Future Hard Rock Casino on Albion Road.

You cannot bet on the over-under for how many months behind the Ottawa LRT Phase 2 expansion will be completed.

You cannot bet on the number of trash bags thrown in the ditch along Borrisokane Road or Second Line Road in October by area residents who do not want to pay the \$3 tag cost for going over the city's three-bag trash limit, which goes into effect Oct. 1.

You cannot bet on how many antisemitic posts on the X platform that any executives from Ontario's labour unions will post, and then delete claiming they did not intend to be antisemitic.

You cannot bet on how many times the Ottawa Police Service will be called in to restore order after angry mobs show up at Ottawa-Carleton District School Board meetings during the 2024-25 school year.

You cannot bet on how many months behind the OCDSB will be when they attempt to manage the construction of their next school once they receive funding.

You cannot bet on how many school bus routes will be cancelled by OSTA each and every day.

You cannot bet on how many months behind construction will be on the proposed new downtown arena, though there may be some bookies willing to take some sweet action on that bet if the OCDSB and the consortium responsible for building the LRT are collaborating on this project.

Should the park and ride school bus ride model be used to shuttle Sens fans to the impossible-to-get-to LeBreton Flats area, you cannot bet on how many of these buses will be cancelled if OSTA is in charge of this plan.

And if OSTA is in charge of the Sens' park and ride plan, you cannot bet on how many of their bus drivers will quit on a game-to-game basis.

You cannot bet on how many times in a day Carleton MP and Conservative Party of Canada leader Pierre Poilievre will say "carbon tax election." However, with beer, coolers and wine now available at corner stores, there is an opportunity for a "Pierre said carbon tax election drinking game."

You cannot bet on any sweet action on an Ottawa LRT parlay bet that includes a sinkhole, a derailment and trains not running due to extreme cold weather.

You cannot bet on what costume Prime Minister Justin Trudeau will wear on his next trip to India, or whether it is more offensive than embarrassing, or vice-versa.

You cannot bet on the over-under on the percentage that homeowners' taxes will increase due to Mayor Mark Sutcliffe's

claim that the federal and provincial governments shortchanged the City of Ottawa by hundreds of millions of dollars, sending the city into a financial tailspin.

You cannot bet on how many landowners and property owners will be pissed off at the RVCA when the

next round of wetlands declarations is announced.

You cannot bet on the exact shade of black according to the Adobe photoshop colour wheel that will be on the next

photos that surface of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau wearing black face.

You cannot bet on the over-under on how long you will wait the next time you go to the Queensway-Carleton Hospital or when you take your child to CHEO.

You cannot bet on how many truckers will show up for the next freedom convoy.

You cannot bet on how many Timbits Pierre Poilievre will bring to the truckers during the duration of the next convoy.

You cannot bet on where Prime Minister Justin Trudeau will be hunkered down during the next convoy. That means that if he is hunkered down in India, you cannot create a parlay bet combining him being in India and what ridiculous outfit drawing public ridicule he will be wearing.

You cannot bet on the possibility of pro-Palestinian protestors blocking the routes into Ottawa's downtown, thus negating any chance of the truckers from the convoy getting into downtown Ottawa.

You cannot bet on how many restaurant owners in downtown Ottawa will want to pee in the soup of any of the PSAC leaders responsible for telling its employees to boycott downtown businesses.

You cannot bet on how much money Governor General Mary Simon will spend on clothing for her next major official trip.

You cannot bet on how many times federal government employees will not get paid because of problems with the Phoenix Pay System.

You cannot bet on how deep the next sinkhole on Rideau Street will be.

You cannot bet on what the percentage of votes influenced by Chinese government interference will be in the upcoming federal and provincial elections.

You cannot bet on how many acres of greenbelt land will be used for development for the remainder of Premier Doug Ford's political term.

You can't bet on how many more letters, numbers and symbols will be added to 2SLGBTQIA+ between now and calendar year end 2025. OLG doesn't even know who is in charge of adding letters and symbols.

And finally, you cannot bet on how many complaints we will receive because of this column.

If you gamble, please pay responsibly. For help and support with gambling issues, please visit playsmart.ca.

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