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Please save the citizenship ceremonies!

Citizenship ceremonies are emotional and personal experiences, especially for those of us new Canadians who had the privilege of participating in one.

Now the Department of Citizenship and Immigration has given notice that they were contemplating an end in-person citizenship ceremonies in favour of a “secure online solution.” In-person ceremonies could still be arranged upon request, but subject to a delay.

I still remember the citizenship ceremony I had to attend when I proudly became a Canadian citizen in 1975. Dressed in my Hugo Boss suit, I was with my wife and son, all of us dressed up in our finest, lined up with new Canadians of all backgrounds, happily showing off the Canadian flags.

When the time came to sing the newly memorized national anthem, I was so emotional that my eyes welled up with tears. Every Canada Day, I still have visions of my touching citizenship ceremony experience, and thankful prayers to Canada for providing a happy, wonderful and prosperous life.

Yes, Canada, I haven't been disappointed.

I am horrified the government is proposing to abolish this special welcoming in-person citizenship ceremonies with an administrative online box and do away with a group singing “O Canada.” The government brief also notes that the new system will prevent the inconvenience of new citizens having to book time off work to make the ceremony. What a concession!

The fact that Canada, the



Mansoor Ladha
Mansoor's Musings

most friendly and welcoming nation in the world, would resort to a computer-oriented system to announce that immigrants are now citizens is appalling and upsetting. Ceremonies in everyone's life, be it a birthday or a retirement party, play an important part, signifying a milestone in their lives.

A former minister of immigration under then-Prime Minister Jean Chretien, himself an Argentinian immigrant to Canada, was so upset that he wrote an op-ed in the Toronto Star, calling it “an insult.”

“For years, my parents would recount how momentous and meaningful (the ceremony) was. Why would government want to rob future citizens of this feeling of attachment?”

Another prominent defender, former Governor General Adrienne Clarkson who came to Canada as a refugee from Japanese-occupied Hong Kong and presided over a few citizenship ceremonies herself as an Officer of the Order of Canada, said she was “horried” by the proposed change.

Tareq Hadhad, a Syrian refugee famous for founding the Nova Scotia-based chocolatier



Peace by Chocolate, described Canadian citizenship ceremonies as “the magical rituals that bring together everyone (new and old citizens) to celebrate the true meaning of the Canadian dream.”

“We cannot afford to lose the significance of this celebration of belonging nor can we diminish the value of Canadian citizenship,” he added.

Credit should, however, be given to the government for moving a notch forward toward truth and reconciliation of Indigenous peoples by officially recognizing First Nations, Inuit and Métis, and the obligation of all citizens to respect the treaties between the Crown and Indigenous nations.

The new oath now includes “Indigenous, Inuit and Métis rights, and will help new Canadians better understand the role of Indigenous peoples, the ongoing impact of colo-

nialism and residential schools and our collective obligation to uphold the treaties.”

“Canada's Oath of Citizenship is a commitment to this country — and that includes the national project of reconciliation,” said Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations Carolyn Bennett. “This is an important step on our shared journey of reconciliation.”

“The new language in Canada's Oath of Citizenship is a concrete step forward on rebuilding relationships with Indigenous peoples as it responds to Call to Action 94 of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. It is so important that new Canadians understand the rights and significant contributions of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis.”

The new language of the oath reads: “I swear (or affirm) that I will be faithful and bear true allegiance to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Second,

Queen of Canada, Her Heirs and Successors, and that I will faithfully observe the laws of Canada, including the Constitution, which recognizes and affirms the Aboriginal and treaty rights of First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples, and fulfil my duties as a Canadian citizen.”

All Canadians and would-be citizens should protest the proposal to replace citizenship ceremonies with something tantamount to a “dial-a-citizen” method.

Becoming a citizen by ticking the “Make Me A Canadian” box from anywhere is an impolite method of becoming a citizen of one's country.

Mansoor Ladha is a Calgary-based journalist and author of three nonfiction books: Off the Cuff, Memoirs of a Muhindi: Fleeing East Africa for the West and A Portrait in Pluralism: Aga Khan's Shia Ismaili Muslims

Too many doing a sloppy job of recycling, or not recycling at all

Dear editor,

Many of us are doing a sloppy job of recycling or not recycling at all.

At the city's Kipling Street bins, there are lots of big cans of unwashed spaghetti sauce in the metals bin still labelled with the restaurant's name from a local pizza place. Kudos to that restaurant for trying to recycle and maybe that's OK for recycling, but I doubt it.

Then there's a pile of fluorescent tubes, many of them broken, in the

cardboard only bin. There's always lots of stuff in the wrong bins.

At the transfer station in Dunmore there's lots of cardboard in the garbage bins when the cardboard recycling bins are about 20 feet away. There are no plastic recycling bins there, so there's also lots of recyclable plastics in the garbage bins. This plastic could be taken to the plastics recycling in Medicine Hat, but no.

To be fair, I think there are also many of us who are being conscientious and doing the best we can to

recycle properly.

Sometimes, however, I think why bother with recycling when I can easily and quickly throw it all in the garbage with absolute impunity.

Is it sloth, or ignorance or laziness, or entitlement that makes us think we have no responsibility?

I think the City of Medicine Hat, Cypress County and neighboring towns have done a good job of making recycling easy for most people. It's not perfect, but it's good. There are also recycling businesses in the city to make it even

easier, but there's a cost for that.

The workers who have to process the items in the recycling bins deserve plenty of praise for dealing with the sloppy recycling of some people.

As for those who just throw everything including recyclables in the trash, well maybe there's some kind of garbage karma awaiting you.

Ray Marco
Dunmore

Rise in societal intolerance concerning

Dear editor,

Have you noticed an increase in the intolerance in society? March 6 was Black Ballon Day when members of Mom Stop the Harm remember their family members who have died from overdose.

March 1 was the annual Disability Day of Mourning where the disability community holds vigils to recognize people murdered by their families and caregiv-

ers.

It is hard not to notice how the numbers increase year after year.

This morning on the radio there was a story about the increased intolerance toward the homosexual community in Calgary.

I know there is a trend toward intolerance and it is scary, as we know when we look at history this kind of intolerance happens when people feel insecure, when there are high rates of infla-

tion and economic uncertainty.

I think we'd do better to not take out our frustrations on groups of people we don't understand.

A society is better if the most vulnerable of us are taken care of. Think of it as all of the animals getting on Noah's ark, civilization will be better off if we all make it in the end.

Diane MacNaughton
Redcliff

Understanding the cost of care

Dear editor,

In the interest of preserving our universal health-care model, I think it imperative that each of us understand the cost of our care.

Years ago itemized statements were issued, outlining each and every medical visit, procedure, etc. This was invaluable. Not only did it provide awareness of the actual cost of medical care (no it is not free), but it identified physicians who abused the system by billing for services they did

not provide or over billing for those they did.

So I am asking each of you to phone Alberta Health Services, ask for an agent and request a statement for the last 18 months of care provided to you.

They are happy to comply as long as you have your Alberta Health Care number. Our system is in crisis and obviously one of the contributing factors is the ever rising cost of care. Do your part.

Barbara Pasternak
Medicine Hat

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