

## Standard online reader survey



**Q: Did you take advantage of early voting in the Republican and Democratic primaries?**

**YES or NO**

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## GUEST EDITORIAL

## Answers often elusive in murderous attacks

Humankind is a narrative species. We instinctively seek to make sense of things, to find the story line and, crucially, its lessons. We always want to know why.

In the aftermath of the murderous van attack Monday on Toronto pedestrians — 10 dead, 14 injured — and after similar horrors around the world, we want to impose order on chaos, find meaning in the seemingly random.

More than anything, we want death to mean something. We want at least that comfort. How, otherwise, to reconcile the loss of the vibrant Anne Marie D'Amico, a former Tennis Canada ball girl and perennial volunteer run down on Yonge Street near the investment firm where she worked?

Even as Toronto turned Tuesday to the familiar rituals of leaving flowers on sidewalks, creating memorials on walls, holding prayer vigils, raising money for shattered families, we wish the irrational explained.

Reared on parables and fables, we usually favour archetypes. Heroes and villains. Evil attacking good. Innocence lost. Little vexes us as much as a story without a moral.

It seemed certain, as the motive of the perpetrator was plumbed, that it would turn out to be familiar — a random targeting of scapegoats to compensate for his

**Toronto Star**

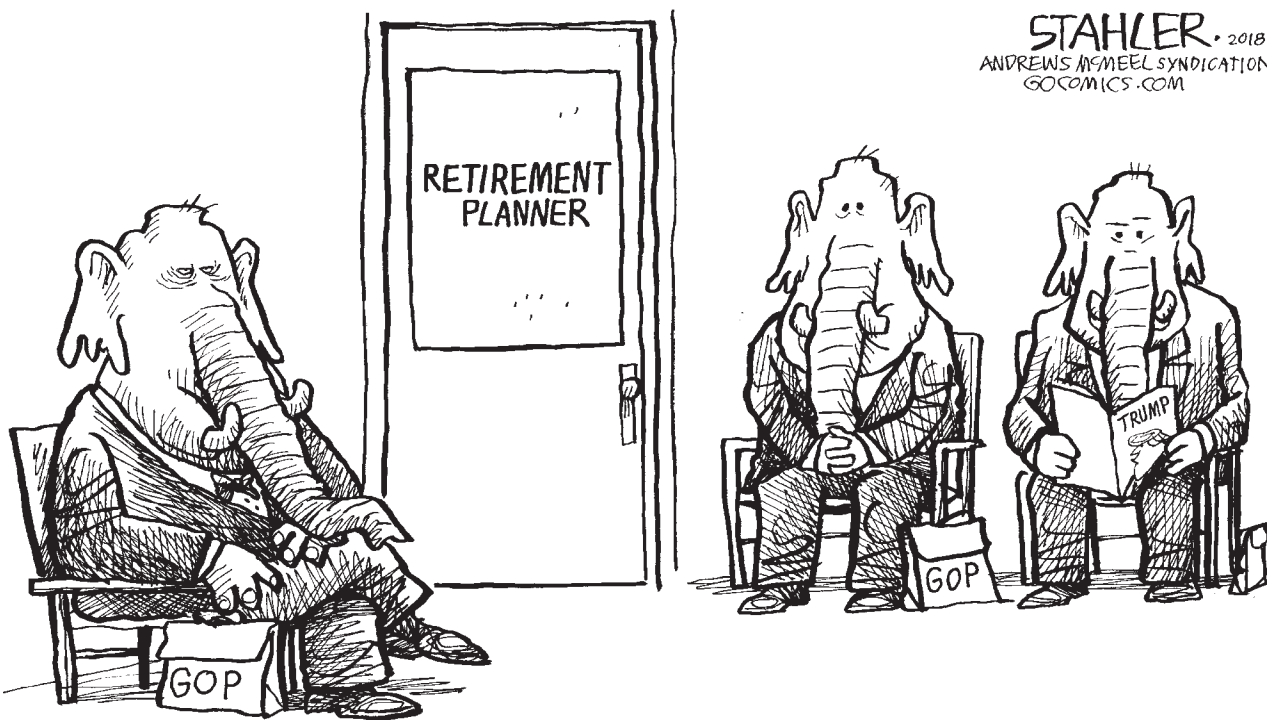
own hurt and torment, inadequacy or delusion.

Yet, there were hints the driver was selective in his victims. Police said Tuesday that, minutes before beginning his drive of devastation across the Yonge Street sidewalks, the man posted a cryptic comment to Facebook lauding an American mass killer motivated by a hatred of women. Most of the victims, police said, were women. Beyond that, Detective-Sgt. Graham Gibson said he could make no "general and sweeping statement" about motive.

It should always be recalled that the perpetrator is not of another species. He is of us. Humanity has always been as capable of hatred and horror as of genius and grace. Poets and scientists both speak of the capacity for aberrance in the human psyche.

"The mind is its own place, and in itself can make a heaven of hell and a hell of heaven," Milton said four centuries ago in *Paradise Lost*. And so it remains.

In consolation, we were reminded that men and women, even in the worst of moments, and thankfully in the vast majority, are capable of selflessness, generosity and resilience. Sometimes, that's the only lesson there is.



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## Headlong retreat from morality

One number illustrates how seriously the Trump administration violates our nation's most basic moral principles. That figure is 11, the number of Syrian refugees admitted to this country in 2018. Only 44 have arrived since the beginning of the fiscal year last October.

The president has expressed strong support for the victims of Bashar al-Assad's murderous regime in Damascus — "Another humanitarian disaster," he tweeted after a recent chemical attack. But in an act of mean-spirited, wrong-headed hypocrisy, Trump has slammed the door on the victims of countless "humanitarian disasters" in Syria and around the world.

Under Trump, the annual quota for admitting refugees to the United States has been slashed to 45,000, down from 110,000 under Barack Obama and half the historic average of 90,000.

"At a time of widespread need, the United States is in headlong retreat from the principles and practices that for so long has made it a global beacon," David Milliband, president of the International Rescue Committee, wrote in *The Washington Post*.

Trump's repeated attempts to block immigration from mainly Muslim countries have been thwarted by a series of federal judges, and one of those cases, brought by the state of Hawaii, reached the Supreme Court this week.

But when it comes to refugees — displaced persons seeking asylum for political reasons — Trump has more discretion. His trampling of human decency has been ruthlessly efficient, and Syria is only one example. Through the first four months of the

fiscal year, only 81 Iraqi refugees gained entry to the U.S., compared to 4,700 in the previous year.

"During the worst refugee crisis in world history, the United States is failing in its very limited commitment to admit refugees," concludes the Refugee Council.

The Trump administration makes two arguments for its restrictive policy: Refugees endanger American security, and they drain public resources. Both are blatantly false.

On security: The Cato Institute says violence committed by refugees is virtually nonexistent and estimates the

chance of an American dying in a terrorist attack committed by a refugee is 1 in 3.64 billion.

On economics: Last year, the White House commissioned a report from its own Department of Health and Human Services, trying to document the cost of refugee resettlement. When the report contradicted the president's prejudices — it showed that refugees contribute a net benefit of \$63 billion to the economy over 10 years — the White House spiked the document, according to *The New York Times*.

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 65.6 million people have been displaced from their homes worldwide; 22.5 million are refugees. Twenty more people are uprooted every minute — more than 28,000 every day.

In the face of "the worst refugee crisis in world history," this president hardens his heart and turns his back. History will not forget or forgive him.

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### COLUMNISTS

STEVE & COKIE  
ROBERTS



### THE SCOOP

JAMES  
CLARK



## We shouldn't drive faster

Do you want to go faster?

Those words, popularized by the Himalaya operator at the fair, now seem to be the adopted slogan for Warren County motorists.

Speed wasn't necessarily a factor, but inattentiveness was, on Tuesday afternoon when a car slammed into the side of a horse and buggy in front of Chicken Chef. I arrived on the scene to learn the man and woman who were in the buggy had been thrown onto the hood and windshield of the car and were shaken. The horse looked spooked, but appeared physically OK.

I posted the accident to the *Southern Standard's* Facebook page and was surprised by the amount of reaction.

One person suggested that horse-and-buggy travel should have its own special lane since we have several people in our community who rely on that mode of transportation.

Another person asked if the buggy is tagged and titled.

Still another stated the obvious and said if you can't see a horse pulling a carriage then you don't need to be driving.

One person posted my thoughts exactly. "This is such a sad thing. No way would I ride in a horse-drawn buggy the way people drive. Prayers for those injured."

While the traffic conditions in Warren County shouldn't be generalized by a single horse-and-buggy crash, I think it would be an overall benefit if local motorists took their foot off the gas and put their eyes more on the road.

I say this realizing two things:

- 1) everybody thinks they are a spectacular driver.
- 2) everybody thinks everyone else is a terrible driver.

It was comedian George Carlin who once quipped, "Have you ever noticed that anybody driving slower than you is an idiot, and anyone going faster than you is a maniac?"

There was a kind lady who sent me a letter to the editor a couple months ago which I never published. I was a fine letter, but the lady refused to give her name and wanted it published anonymously. We don't do that. But I will use two sentences from her letter in this space.

"I see cars speeding, ridiculously speeding, up and down that hill all the time," she wrote referring to a hill inside the city limits. "For your sake, my sake, the children's sake and Pete's sake, be aware of your surroundings and have heart for innocent lives."

She was suggesting children and animals in the residential neighborhood where the hill is located were being placed in danger by motorists who are constantly speeding.

I had a resident in the Jacksboro area tell me on Wednesday he had adjusted his driving speed due to all the horse carriages in that area. He says he feels more comfortable and the slower speed only costs him a minute or so in drive time.

I realize we all want to go faster, but perhaps it's time to ease the pedal off the metal and back off this dizzying pace.

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## What makes Christian music?

When Larry Norman died in 2008, there was one thing the critics — secular and religious — agreed: The controversial singer and music maven helped create the "Contemporary Christian Music" industry.

For Norman, that was not good news.

"In China, if you become a Christian, you may be imprisoned," said Norman, offering a cynical aside during his last concert, in New York City. "In India, your parents may disown you. In the Middle East, they might execute you. But in America, if you become a Christian, you just have a broader selection of Christian CDs to choose from."

Seven months later, his fragile heart failed one last time.

Norman lived to see the fiery folk-rock style he pioneered in the early 1970s — part "Jesus Movement" evangelism, part social-justice sermons — evolve into a suburb-friendly genre in which "Christian" was attached to safe versions of old fads in mainstream music.

While writing his Norman biography, "Why Should the Devil Have All the Good Music?" philosopher Gregory Alan Thornbury dug into the singer's papers.

"All of the songs I write are Christian songs, because I am a Christian," wrote Norman. "Is a man any less a Christian because he is a car mechanic instead of an evangelist? ... Some people are so conditioned that if a song doesn't have some religious clues like 'blood of the lamb' or 'the cross,' they are unsure of its spiritual qualification."

Part of the problem, said Thornbury, is Norman had "a glorious way of

speaking out of both sides of his mouth. He never wavered from his desire to write Jesus songs. ... Yet at the same time, he was constantly blasting Christian music people about making music that was propaganda — with no art, or poetry, or mystery at all. ... Larry thought you could be very, very clear on Jesus and the Gospel and, at the same time, go way out there on the edge in terms of art."

Alas, it was hard to be a commercial, secular success while doing both those things.

This is a topic — battles to define "Christian" art, film and literature — that I have been writing about since the late 1970s. In my own book, "Pop Goes Religion: Faith in Popular Culture," I concluded that

gatekeepers and consumers in the marketplace use six definitions. Thus, "Christian" music is:

1. Hymns — period.
2. Any style of music appropriate for use in worship services.
3. Openly Christian music in all genres — except rock 'n' roll.
4. Any music — even hip-hop or heavy metal — built on evangelistic lyrics.
5. Music with sufficient "God-talk" (CCM's "Jesus-per-minute rule").
6. Music made by Christians that expresses their Christian worldview.

Norman fit in several camps. He wrote folk music people sang in church, as well as raging guitar-rock that bashed trends in modern church life. He attacked some of the niches his own art helped create.

Terry Mattingly is the editor of *GetReligion.org*. He lives in Oak Ridge.

### ON RELIGION

TERRY  
MATTINGLY

