

Downtown Community Court cares for mentally ill

Re: Mentally ill man's arrest angers family; Minor infraction nets three weeks in jail before committal to psychiatric hospital, Jan. 15

I was distressed to see this article as it highlights the difficulties people with serious mental illnesses can have when they interact with our legal system.

I am a psychiatrist who works in many of the buildings in the DTES of Vancouver and treat individuals like the gentleman in this article.

I have now had the opportunity to work with people who are arrested and go through the Downtown Community Court (DCC) for their legal proceedings. My patients were attending there for minor offences they had committed. Often in these cases I went to court at the request of the defence lawyers or judge and prosecutors to assist the court in its understanding of the individual's mental illness. It became clear to me that the goal of the court was not only to appropriately administer justice but to also use this opportunity to try to help people with mental illnesses so they would not be criminalized for their psychiatric problems.

I am very impressed how everyone involved with the DCC from the sheriffs, prosecutors, judges and defence lawyers to the specific mental health probation officers are working as a team to prevent this kind of episode from happening. The most necessary component is the ability of all involved to be observant and use common sense to assess a person's statements and behaviours to see if they give clues as to a person's mental state. All too often people with serious mental illnesses such as schizophrenia cannot advocate for themselves because their illness prevents them from being able to do so. It is then the responsibility of our society to ensure they are treated fairly and appropriately. That is exactly what happens at DCC.

People should know that this kind of episode could have been totally avoided if the legal proceedings were held at Vancouver's Downtown Community Court.

This gentleman would have received rapid, illness-appropriate assessment and treatment and would not have languished in jail for weeks waiting for someone to notice he was mentally ill.

DR. BILL MACEWAN
Vancouver

Global warming is so yesterday

Re: What's next for B.C.'s carbon tax?, Jan. 14

According to news reports, the U.K. Met Office, a leading supporter of the UN Anthropogenic Global Warming propaganda, revealed on its website Christmas Eve that despite increases in greenhouse gases — including carbon dioxide emissions — there has been no global warming since 1997.

This finding undermines Marc Lee's statement that "our addiction to fossil fuels are starting to pile up" as extreme weather events such as "hurricane Sandy." There is now no scientific basis to impose carbon taxes such as those enacted at a time of environmental scaremongering some years ago by our gullible leaders.

Carbon taxes that are siphoning money from taxpayers should be abrogated, and fossil fuels should be used actively, with the best technology to reduce air and water pollution, to improve our standard of living.

JITI KHANNA
Vancouver

Sexual orientation just one part of identity

Re: Jodie Foster's roundabout coming out gets mixed reviews, Jan. 15

Jodie Foster's acceptance speech at the Golden Globes has led to much debate and controversy about her sexual orientation and her responsibilities towards the lesbian and gay community. Foster was delivering a complex and important message to the wider community, a message that sexual orientation is only one aspect of a person's identity. We all have multiple identities, whether as single or married, females or males, Aboriginal or white, Muslim or Christian, gay or straight — and many others. Not all the identities that each of us has are necessarily salient at a given time and place. At the Golden Globes, it was timely that Foster be acknowledged for her identity as a remarkable actress-director. At the same time, Foster demonstrated her love and appreciation to those most central in her life, without seeking to protect her sexual orientation. Such a

complex negotiation of identity serves as a lesson for us all, particularly those of us who work with young people at a vulnerable stage of their lives. The challenge for educators is to consider how the recognition of multiple identities might translate to educational programs and practices that will promote greater equity and hope for all. Good on you, Jodie!

BONNY NORTON

Professor, Language and Literacy Education, UBC
Vancouver

Fame and fortune are dubious reasons for taking drugs

Re: Armstrong admits doping to win, Jan. 15

So Lance Armstrong finally admitted to being a lying cheater. How many of us would be tempted to lie and cheat if we could obtain global adoration and millions of dollars to boot? Few of us will ever be faced with such a temptation. Most of us have never experienced an all-consuming desire to push our body and mind to the limit of endurance for a chance to win at anything. Some people seek fame and fortune in the lucrative field of professional sports; less energetic folks may choose politics.

We love to worship conquering heroes because we get a free emotional ride on the backs of their dedication, passion and exploits. We love to vilify fallen heroes because we get a chance to crucify them and feel a little better about ourselves and our ordinary lives. Too bad Lance, but you were always too good to be true.

LLOYD ATKINS
Vernon

Oh, to be in England now ...

Thank goodness those Conservative ads about Thomas Mulcair and his evil carbon tax appear to have ended. I was becoming very concerned for the NDP leader. The last politician to introduce such a tax was sent, by the Conservatives, to London just before the Olympics.

ROBERT MOFFATT
Coquitlam



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