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Where the teenagers can't roam: La Ronge, Sask., enforcing curfew to crack down on young vandals



TRISTIN HOPPER | November 29, 2015 10:40 PM ET
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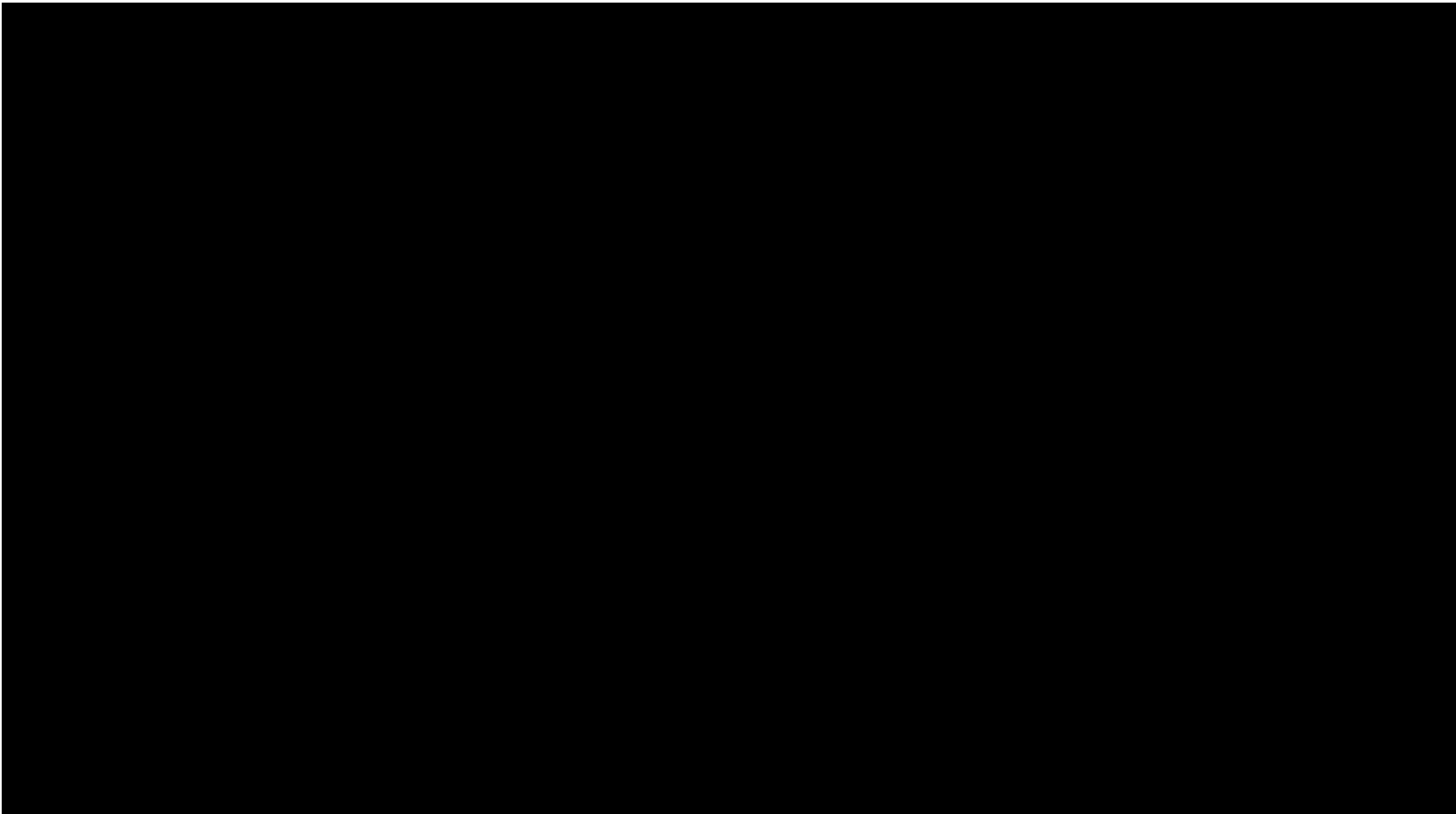
GREG PENDER / The STARPHOENIX

Only months after La Ronge, Sask., captured the hearts of a nation for staring down a city-levelling forest fire, it was catching hell for cracking down on teenage vandals with a mandatory curfew.

The 11 p.m. curfew is “stupid,” “bull.,” “oppressive,” and “dystopian,” said a wave of comments on the announcement, which spent more than 24 hours as Facebook’s top-trending Canadian news story.

“And now dictatorship rules, im (sic) really beginning to wander (sic) if Canada is still a free county (sic),” said one particularly irate critic.

But La Ronge Mayor Thomas Sierzycki, who was 17 when the northern Saskatchewan town first put a curfew on the books, is resolute.



Thomas Sierzycki

Mayor at Town of La Ronge · November 19 at 7:10am · Edited ·



Town of La Ronge Anti-Property Crime/Vandalism Task Force

Due to the increase in property crimes and vandalism, the Town of La Ronge Curfew Bylaw (2005) will be enforced by the RCMP. Youth who are under 18 must not be unaccompanied between the hours of 11pm and 6am (full bylaw available at www.laronge.ca or the Town office).

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“Obviously, we’re not looking at the opinions of people across this country,” he said, “we’re looking at the opinions from our community.”

Because, while youth curfews may prompt indignation and even the occasional court action in Canada’s urban centres, in dozens of rural and First Nations communities they remain the go-to strategy to keep teenage ne’er-do-wells out of trouble.

“Whereas the increase in juvenile delinquency has been caused in part by the number of minors who are permitted to remain in public places ... therefore the problem of juvenile delinquency can be reduced by regulating the hours during which minors may remain in public places,” reads the curfew bylaw for the town of Valleyview, Alta., one of several in the prairie provinces that sends its youth home before midnight.

Although the exact ages and curfew times vary, similar laws are on the books in Okotoks, Drumheller, Slave Lake and the 90,000-strong city of Red Deer, among others in Alberta alone.

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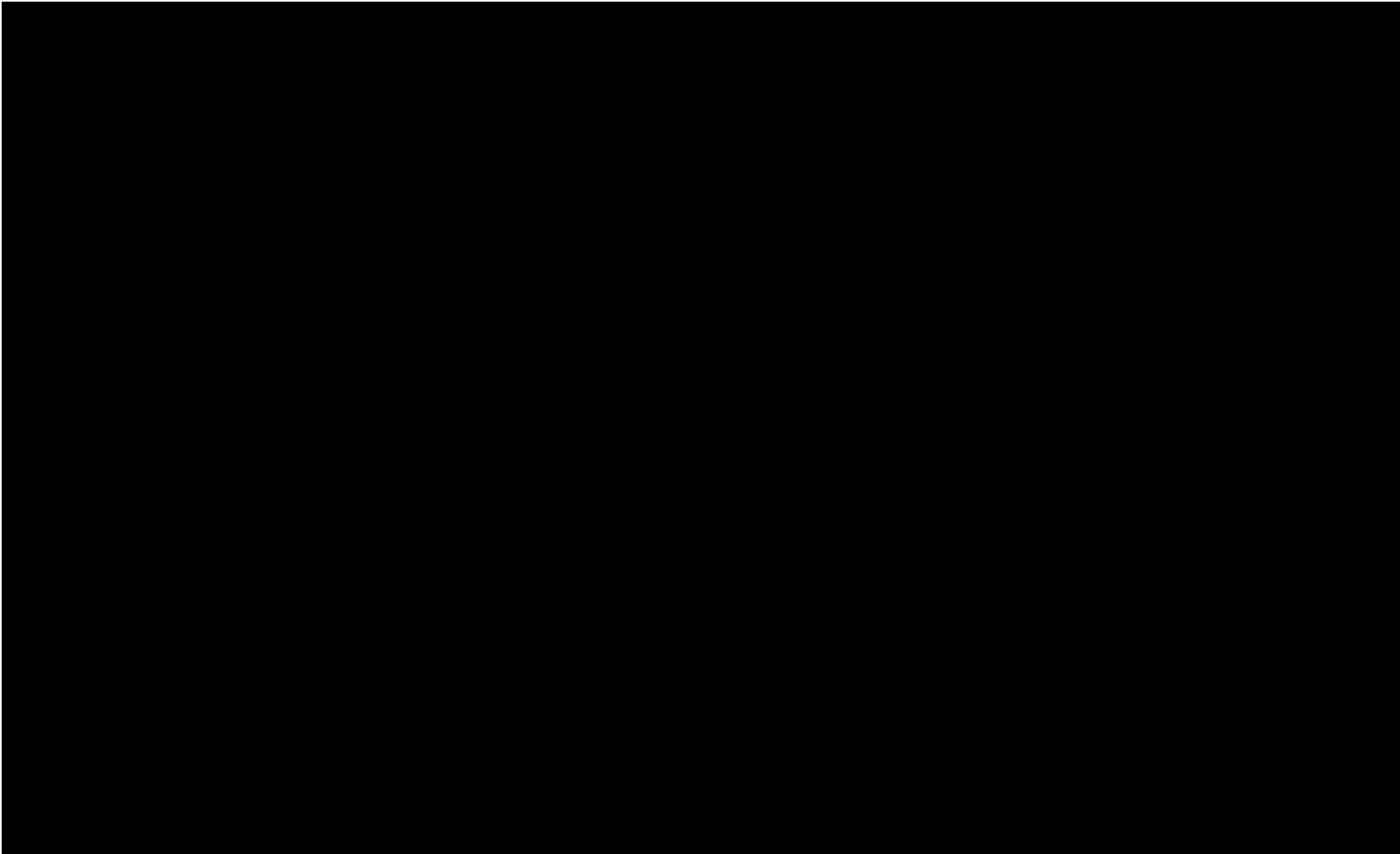
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Curfews are also popular among Northern and First Nations communities, which frequently have to contend with larger-than-average crime rates and youth populations.

One of Canada’s strictest youth curfews, in fact, was just enacted at Saskatchewan’s Standing Buffalo First Nation. After band councillors heard reports of unaccompanied teenagers being approached by strangers at a nearby highway, they began sending home anyone under the age of 16 between 9 p.m. and 8 a.m.

“We care about our children and don’t want them to become a statistic in such a case,” read a July Facebook post by band councillors.

In Kugluktuk, Nunavut — which is currently experiencing 21-hour darkness — youth are regularly summoned to bed at 10 p.m. by the sounding of an air-raid-style community siren. A curfew siren also blares nightly in Churchill, Man., where roving youth must also contend with roving polar bears.



In most cases, curfews first hit municipal books to combat a wave of petty damage being committed by bored youth: Stolen lawn sprinklers, pulled-up flowerbeds, rocks sling-shotted through windows and doorbells rigged to buzz perpetually.

“These kids have irresponsible mothers ... something had to be done,” a homeowner in Alix, Alta., told Alberta Report when her community imposed a youth curfew in 1998.

La Ronge’s own decision to dust off its curfew came about as a response to a wave of devastating home break-ins.

Over two days in mid-November, 15 to 20 residences were hit in the dead of night. Perpetrators made off with thousands of dollars in goods, including guns and ammunition, and left a trail of destruction in their wake: Smashed mirrors, upended furniture and kitchens strewn with food.

“ Something had to be done

And on Nov. 18, La Ronge RCMP announced that they had arrested some of the suspected perpetrators; a 13-year-old boy from Hall Lake and a 15- and 16-year-old from the Lac La Ronge Reserve.

“When (youth) are wandering late at night and people aren’t questioning why they’re out at night, homes become targets a lot easier,” said Sierzycki, who noted that enforcing the curfew is only the first step of a municipal plan to get delinquency under control in time for the spring melt, when vandalism typically spikes.

The curfew allows La Ronge RCMP to question any youth seen outside after 11 p.m., and if they are not accompanied by an adult or returning from work, their parents could be issued with a \$50 ticket, rising to \$100 for subsequent offences.

Although the effectiveness of youth curfews is debated, cursory U.S. research has found that curfew laws do indeed have a measurable effect on keeping teenagers out of court, and out of the hospital.

“The arrest data suggest that being subject to a curfew reduces the arrests of juveniles below the curfew age by approximately 10 per cent in the five years following enactment,” read a 2011 study of U.S. curfew laws out of the University of California, Berkeley.



Don Healy / Leader-Post

While La Ronge’s right to a curfew is backed by Saskatchewan’s Northern Municipalities Act, the policy still dwells in a bit of a legal grey area.

In 2007, Thompson, Man., had to double back on its curfew plans when local residents filed a constitutional challenge, alleging that the policy unfairly discriminated against children and teenagers.

Huntingdon, Que., similarly had a curfew quashed in 2004 by the Quebec Human Rights Commission.

But in a town where many homeowners are only a few degrees of separation away from a fellow resident that saw their house ransacked by teenagers, Sierzycki is confident he is backing a popular policy.

“I’m glad to see a curfew,” said one La Ronge resident posting to Sierzycki’s Facebook, noting that he was particularly concerned for the safety of any youth who become accustomed to forcing their way into La Ronge homes.

“They will eventually break into the wrong house and vigilante justice will be served,” he wrote.

National Post

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Peter Gerard Beninger · Lasalle Secondary School

Tiny bits of sanity such as this are bound to be pilloried in today's society. Let the dogs bark.

Like · Reply · 26 · 22 hrs



Sandra Buchwald

I'd support this curfew if towns also institued curfews that kept old people like you locked up during daylight hours.

Like · Reply · 8 · 22 hrs



Dave K. Welch

Sandra Buchwald- Because old people like him are responsible for all the vandalism that costs everyone so much money, as opposed to being a tax payer who helps pay for our infratructure and social programs?

Like · Reply · 21 · 21 hrs



Brad Salter · Kwalikum Secondary School

Dave K. Welch but what about the kids who aren't getting into trouble. Letting a few bad apples ruin it for everyone else Is lame. Besides kids are so dumb they lead the cops to themselves anyways. It all sounds like an easy fix but it's not fair to the majority of good kids. My brother and me were out late when young but we didn't ruin other people's day. Same as our freinds

Like · Reply · 20 hrs

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Maureen Matthew

La Ronge is hardly a Prairie town. It is an isolated northern town with a high percentage of poorly educated and unemployable First Nations youth, that might be the start of the problem. And if that sounds racist, suck it up, it is a fact that too many don't want to acknowledge

Like · Reply · 11 · 13 hrs



Spencer Ferguson

Wa, wa, wa.

If it's SO bad, why don't they move?

Like · Reply · 7 hrs



Calvin Hobbes · Kansai University

Where are the parents that allow them wander at all hours of the night???

Like · Reply · 8 · 11 hrs



Lynne Newton-adams · Works at Retired

At home, drunk?

Like · Reply · 6 · 11 hrs



Don Shirl McMillan

The responsible parents are most likely sitting at home wondering how they can force their kids to be home without themselves getting in trouble by forcing them to obey the law. Then you have those that have the attitude that it's not my kid that's the problem and refuse to support corrective efforts and then, those that could are less...

Like · Reply · 7 hrs



Spencer Ferguson

Don Shirl McMillan Wow.
Parenting isn't that difficult.

Don't breed.

Like · Reply · 2 · 7 hrs

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Garry Horsnell

On TV at 11 pm, they used to ask - Do you know where your children are?

I guess the teens were rampaging and the parents didn't care.

Now some towns are imposing 11 pm curfews.

But the article says "The 11 p.m. curfew is “stupid,” “bull.,” “oppressive,” and “dystopian,” said a wave of comments on the announcement, which spent more than 24 hours as Facebook’s top-trending Canadian news story".

So let the teens rampage and wreck property. That's a better idea. Right?

Like · Reply · 7 · 11 hrs · Edited



Brad Salter · Kwalikum Secondary School

Maybe the next crime in town will ground you in your house.

Like · Reply · 8 hrs



Spencer Ferguson

Brad Salter Maybe you should come out from the basement?

Like · Reply · 7 hrs



Gordon Arnold · Works at The Carillon

The town I grew up,in had a 9 pm curfew for anyone under 16. At 9 pm a siren used to sound. It could b heard all over town.

Like · Reply · 5 · 10 hrs



Spencer Ferguson

Remember the parents saying, "Come home when the streetlights come on!"?

Like · Reply · 2 · 7 hrs

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