

COMMENT

World-class city ... no-class mayor

John Tory should step up and run for Toronto mayor in 2014



STEPHEN SKYVINGTON

Let's cut to the chase. Mayor Rob Ford is seriously damaging the Conservative brand in Toronto and needs to be replaced. Not by anyone sitting on council, and certainly not by his brother, Doug. That would be just as big a disaster. No, I'm talking about finding a true Conservative — someone who is knowledgeable, sensible and a consensus-builder. Someone who is the antithesis of the current Tea Party mayor. Someone like John Tory. Tory ran for mayor of Toronto back in 2003. Starting at 3 per cent in the polls, he ended up with 38 per cent of the ballots cast — a scant five points behind the eventual winner, David Miller. Unfortunately, instead of throwing his hat in the ring again in 2006, Tory ran for leader of the Progressive Conservative Party and presided over its disastrous showing in the 2007 provincial election. It seemed as if Tory was once again going to take up the challenge in 2010 and run for mayor. He unfortunately changed his mind after Nick Kouvalis, Ford's campaign manager, threatened to launch a smear campaign attacking Tory's credibility. The rest is history. Frontrunner George Smitherman blew a big lead and Rob Ford — amazingly, unbelievably — became mayor of Toronto. While Ford got off to a promising start — privatizing garbage collection for half the city and bringing a number of unions to their knees during contract negotiations for a variety of City of Toronto employees — the circus had clearly come to town and continued to grow, day after day, week after week. It became such a distraction, even supporters of the mayor and his brother could no longer ignore the obvious. Whether it was the crack-smoking allegations, the alleged public drunkenness at various events, run-ins with the integrity commissioner and the courts, or his antics as a high school football coach, it quickly came to feel as though Ford Nation was being led by an Edsel.

The mayor's latest transgression — launching ro-bocalls attacking councillor and former executive committee member, Paul Ainslie, over his stance on the Scarborough subway — merely continues a pattern of misbehaviour and political skulduggery that leads any sane person to one conclusion and one conclusion only: this man is not fit for office. I'm saying that as a Conservative and former supporter of Rob Ford — which is why I feel it's paramount John Tory should step up to the plate and run for mayor of Toronto in 2014. While I understand there are plenty of perfectly valid reasons for the man not to do this — he has built a successful life, post-politics, as the host of a popular radio talk show on Newstalk 1010 and as the chair of CivicAction — the fact is there remains some significant unfinished business for him. I'm referring to the 2007 Ontario election campaign and his ultimate ouster as PC party leader. Tory ran a decent, principled, issue-driven campaign against Liberal leader and then-premier Dalton McGuinty. Tory lost and our province is the poorer for it — as time has shown. The big question is: Will he run? A lot of people — Conservatives, Liberals and even those who are apolitical, I suspect — are hoping he does. Otherwise, Toronto will continue to be a world-class city with a no-class mayor. That just won't cut it.

Stephen Skyvington is president of PoliTrain Inc. Follow him on Twitter @SSkyvington.

It quickly came to feel as though Ford Nation was being led by an Edsel.



Ford got off to a promising start, but it's now clear he's not fit for office.

You make decisions in the back rooms, in the back doors that nobody knows about, yet you're ready to throw three of your own under the bus just to protect yourselves.

SENATOR PATRICK BRAZEAU, ADDRESSING THE SENATE ABOUT MOTIONS TO SUSPEND HIM, MIKE DUFFY AND PAMELA WALLIN.

Waterfront public land up for sale

OMB will decide if townhouse development goes ahead



JOAN LITTLE

There's no shortage of neighbourhood issues to rile Burlingtonians. The OMB is on the list again, and so are two waterfront areas. The never-ending Beach Strip saga continued at Halton Region, and will be the subject of a column next week, by which time everything should be decided. The second waterfront issue involves a strip of public land — perhaps 50 feet wide — owned by the city and the Ministry of Natural Resources. It includes the city's unopened road allowance of old Water Street, along the lake from St. Paul to Market streets. Burlington staff provided three options: create a parkette with lake views, preserve the land for future use (recommended), or sell it to neighbours and make street-end windows to the lake at the bottom of St. Paul and Market streets. Council balked at the parkette. Street-end windows were approved, but no parkette, even though the land is publicly owned. The closest neighbours didn't want to give up exclusive use of this scenic public land, on which they already have encroachments, arguing potential vandalism, noise and lack of privacy. Their arguments did not mention that they have made this land look private, which discourages anyone from using it. They argued that seawalls were built at their expense, but, according to Councillor Marianne Meed Ward, the shoreline protection was built on MNR land, and a 1993 judicial decision ruled that subsequent home purchasers assumed that risk and were not entitled to compensation from the seller or the city. (The city would buy the seawall if the park proceeded.) At the committee meeting, one citizen pleaded for a park to benefit residents who would love a walk along the lake. The Burlington waterfront committee concurred. Neighbours threatened lawsuits and councillors caved. Councillor Jack Dennison, who has appealed the city's refusal to grant him an extra lot on his Lakeshore Road property, moved that the land be sold

and that staff report on negotiations within six months. That carried. Meed Ward dissented, and Blair Lancaster suggested that, rather than selling the land, the city should lease it to neighbours, keeping title in public hands to preserve future options. Who knows what redevelopment opportunities may arise? At council, Meed Ward stood her ground. The sale was approved six to one, with a clause suggesting MNR land, too. Neighbours may expect to buy the land cheaply. Imagine the value a large strip would add to lake-front properties. Either charge the full difference, or lease it to them at a rate reflecting the value — no dollar-a-year stuff. They want to buy, not lease. It's doubtful we'll know how much the city receives. We should. What value is waterfront land? The other issue is a council-approved, 58-unit Branthaven townhouse proposal on Ghent Avenue, on eight lots about 300 feet deep that contained single homes. Council reduced development standards significantly. The official plan allows up to 50 units per hectare (this is 49), but only singles, semis, triplexes or a four-storey retirement home. Adding to the congested look are back-to-back townhouses — balconies and no yards. Development standards were greatly relaxed (parking and setbacks) to allow this project. The heavily wooded site will be denuded, and even four city-owned trees along the frontage eliminated. Other standards were also lessened. Probably the worst for neighbours is approval of a front setback to only three metres instead of the required 7.5, enabling a wall of units close to Ghent Avenue. Neighbours have appealed. The site plan had been undelegated, meaning council would decide on its merits, not staff. Branthaven launched a site plan appeal — a technicality only available to a developer — so the OMB will decide on both the merits of the project and its layout. The hearing starts Nov. 28, but no one (city or OMB) told the neighbours about this new twist. Even councillors found out by accident. Residents will need to address the site plan at the appeal. Advance notice would be nice. In an era of Burlington's highly touted citizen engagement charter, residents deserve better.

Freelance columnist Joan Little is a former Burlington alderman and Halton councillor. specjoan@cogeco.ca

War may be hell, but it's strange, too

On the Korean border, an odd mix of testosterone and tourism

THOMAS FROESE

PANMUNJOM, SOUTH KOREA We're at the border of North and South Korea, at the planet's hottest line in the sand, and the guard — a youth in military garb and sunglasses — tells my wife to change her footwear. She is wearing sandals and North Koreans, even from a distance, might see her feet. Which shows that while war may be hell, it's strange, too, certainly this pseudo-war at Panmunjom, the United Nation's demilitarized zone, the so-called DMZ separating the two Koreas that stopped formal shooting 60 years ago but are still without any treaty. We arrived on a bus driving up Unification Road from Seoul, a city of glass, superhighways, sliding doors, immaculately-tiled subways and 10 million people with what must be 10 million smartphones, all apparently Samsungs. This is Unification Road because unity is what Koreans want, that deeper connection you only can find in other human beings, in your own flesh and blood, even when they're on the other side of hope. Yes, this is just like old Berlin, my native city, divided but without a wall, or sledgehammers or an end in sight. The feeling in the south is that, besides communists in Pyongyang, China and Japan — and maybe even Washington — prefer it this way. Korean nationals aren't allowed to set foot at this exact line — just tourists. Besides emergency shoes, we can buy DMZ T-shirts, North Korean ginseng brandy and other trinkets in the gift shop. My wife and I have been in South Korea to share our development work in Africa. We're with other tourists from Sweden, Australia, Poland and everywhere, with closed shoes, proper jackets and voyeuristic curiosity, side-by-side, lined up straight, looking north. "OK, take pictures NOW!" our guide yells, followed shortly by, "Don't take pictures NOW!" This is a strange mix of testosterone and tourism, where the guards have hard helmets and hard faces clenched as tight as their fists. They are motionless for so long that you're forgiven for thinking they're strategically-placed dummies. It's the same on the other side. Tourists in North Korea look south over the divide, straight at us. The distance is shorter than a 100-metre dash, short enough to make a hell of a run for it and maybe survive, which happened when a Soviet translator defected at this spot. He lived, but in the ensuing fire-



THOMAS FROESE, SPECIAL TO THE HAMILTON SPECTATOR

South Korean flags fly in the demilitarized zone that separates North and South Korea. Sixty years after formal hostilities ended, unification of the two Koreas appears as distant as ever. fight some guards on both sides didn't. It might happen again. Maybe today. Are you ready? Tens of millions of Koreans on both sides of this line have some mandatory military-type service. A few minutes away in this borderland is another picture to remember. It's the children and Freedom Bridge, where 12,000 freed South Korean POWs once crossed, and now a symbol of thankfulness and hope amid the uncertainty. The children are South Koreans on a school trip — nationals are allowed at this site. They walk on old wooden planks under a light rain toward a display of national flags, close to other markers and wishes for unity and rows of barbed wire. The children look at you and you look at them and you wonder about that other war we fight, the one that has to do with surrender more than anything because success and security are important, but not as important as finding your personhood and becoming fully human, this by looking at your enemy and seeing yourself. This is what falls on these children, like any. So they walk across Freedom Bridge and you wonder how they will do with it all — that other war — and if they'll do any different than their parents and grandparents. Then you raise your camera and take your photo before you walk away with your thoughts. Hamilton author and award-winning journalist Thomas Froese is in East Africa most of the year. Visit his blog on fatherhood at dailydad.net or at Facebook/thomfroese and thomasfroese.com

SPEC BRIEFLY

Short and excerpted comments sent to letters@thespec.com

Saskatchewan has right pension idea

If people think the province running a pension plan is a bad idea, why not look to Saskatchewan? I've been an investor in the Saskatchewan Pension Plan (SPP) for several years. You don't have to be a resident of Saskatchewan to contribute. The management-expense ratio is low and runs at about 1 per cent. It has had very healthy returns for almost 30 years. Businesses can contribute for their employees. The big difference is the SPP is voluntary, where the proposed Ontario plan would be mandatory. Imagine that, a mandatory plan with good returns resulting in people having income at retirement instead of relying on OAS, GIS and GAINS, which are supported by my tax dollars. MATTHEW WOODS, HAMILTON

Festival of Friends belongs in Gage Park

Kudos on Elena Kariam's opinion piece in Wednesday's paper. She hit the nail on the head on both subjects but particularly regarding the Festival of Friends. Among I suspect many others, I mourn the loss of the festival at Gage Park, which was a beautiful setting for it. Since it has moved up to Ancaster, I have not and will not make the trek up there. It's just not the same and frankly, bigger isn't always better. It belongs in Gage Park. I am aware that some of the people living in the area complained about the traffic — if they weren't aware of it when they moved there, they should've known. It's only three days out of the year. Is putting up with a temporary bit of inconvenience really that bad? LISA JOHNSTON, STONEY CREEK

Merling's help was invaluable

Henry Merling was one of Hamilton's best councillors. My personal experience with Henry was during the building of our church hall in 1996 at the Church of the Resurrection on Upper Wentworth Street. If it hadn't been for Henry's assistance and dedication in helping us with this project, it would never have seen completion. His tireless efforts on our behalf were the reason we were able to build this hall and enjoy the many parish events for the past 17 years. Rest in peace, dear Henry. You were one of a kind. IRENE STAYSHYN, HAMILTON