

LETTERS

Misplaced priorities

So while there are serious supply chain issues, Justin Trudeau decides to block unvaccinated truck drivers from entering the country. Justify that when shelves are empty and prices are through the roof. Are these drivers a huge threat to the country? There are already problems due to a shortage of truck drivers in both countries.

I understand that on March 14, entertainment venues will be allowed to have full capacity. Doug Ford is killing the hospitality industry, particularly the restaurant sector.

When it comes to sports arenas, showing proof of vaccination and masking was working just fine. Let people decide whether to attend.

It's too bad that both levels of government aren't so concerned with the issues faced by health-care facilities and workers.

Pat Stevens, Grimsby

Get vaccinated or stay home

I am amazed that anyone would support the anti-vax trucker protesters, who also are serving as a shield for far-right extremists. Fortunately, neither our government or Washington will consider changing the vaccine mandate, which is entirely appropriate. Get vaccinated or stay home.

Lorne Allen, Burlington

Missing boosters for kids

Middle school and high school students are back to in-person classes. But this 12- to 17-year-old age group are not yet eligible for booster shots, though there seems to be availability in your pharmacies and clinics. I must be missing something.

Michelle Chin, Dundas

Ford and Groundhog Day

Just curious, if Doug Ford sees his shadow on Groundhog Day, does it mean six more weeks of lockdown?

Jared Quinn, Hamilton

Another photo op

Another photo op for our Premier Ford helping to shovel out stuck cars. What was he thinking! We were told no unnecessary travel, stay at home. How many people followed him around to do this and endangered their lives and others? Stay at home due to a weather emergency means just that for most people. What will he do next for the upcoming photo ops for the next election? They seem more important than keeping this province up to date like the other premiers.

Sheila Cherriere, Hamilton

Subscription challenge

Several people recently wrote letters thanking their carrier for delivering The Spec on the day of the mega snowstorm. My paper was also delivered to my mailbox. While reading the letters, I thought what if there was no Spec to deliver? Paul Berton made it clear that advertising revenue is down, readership is shrinking while other news sources that don't pay journalists are growing in popularity. So what if the day comes that there is no Spec? No morning crossword with your coffee, no birth/orbit announcements. No local trivia news, no articles written by a team of award-winning journalists. No more updates on the Roundtable for Poverty Reduction, no more Code Red followups. No more articles on who/who isn't thinking of running for mayor. It's possible that one day your Spec will not be in your mailbox, with or without a plastic bag. So if you know people who are occasional or online readers, I challenge you to tell them to become a daily "ink and newsprint" subscriber. If you know someone who doesn't read The Spec, I challenge you to tell them to get a subscription. And then if, God forbid, the day comes that there is no Spec to be delivered, at least we can say we tried!

Susan Woodrow, Hamilton

Penalties and crimes

I read with interest Scott Radley's recent article asking when is a penalty in sports a crime. There was "some" mutual consent to contact was his answer. Years ago, while living in Colorado, I asked a similar question to the police chief of the town. The difference being when is an assault on a child at school a crime. The words harassment and assault suddenly become bullying when children are involved. No mutual consent. Why do laws, employment policies and union policies protect workers, but not children? A hard bodycheck in hockey is usually soon forgotten, but daily harassment on a seven-year-old can leave lifelong scars.

Leonard McKee, Hamilton

Erection injection?

We live in a society dominated by fake news that only the most glib and uneducated would fall for. Half the population seems to be wanting to believe the most outlandish lies about what cures the virus and are quite willing to subject their bodies to the most outrageous treatments rather than to follow the science. Perhaps it's time health authorities use fake news. Spread a rumour the vaccine causes tremendous growth in "manhood" and every male would be standing in line in a blizzard waiting for an injection for their erection.

Frieda Huffman, Hamilton



SUBMITTED PHOTO

The Niagara Escarpment is our biosphere reserve, right in the heart of our city, writes Paul Shaker.

Valuing our special geological architecture

PAUL SHAKER

We are lucky for many things in this city, but we often overlook one of our greatest treasures: the Niagara Escarpment. It's embedded in civic life. The view of the lower city and the expansive vista from east to west is a common experience for Hamiltonians, whether driving or walking.

We orient ourselves with it — water to the north, escarpment to the south. Our street system has a false series of roads with the prefix "upper" because of it. It's so fundamental to daily life, we don't give it a second thought.

However, we should give it much more attention especially in planning decisions on how we are going to develop our city over the coming years.

First, why is this landmark so significant? The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has designated the Niagara Escarpment a World Biosphere Reserve.

Biosphere reserves are internationally designated protected areas that are meant to demonstrate a balanced relationship between people and nature.

They are learning areas for sustainable development under diverse ecological, social and economic contexts. In Canada, there are 19 of these reserves, including Claycout Sound on the West coast and Bay of Fundy on the East.

What is unique about our biosphere reserve is that it is one of the few that travels directly through the centre of a major Canadian city, Hamilton.

This isn't a place we travel to, it is part of the geological architecture of the city itself. Thousands of Hamiltonians move around it every day. We have built fantastic city parks on the brow that link to an incredible network of trails.

Again, this would be great in any provincial or national park, but this exists in the centre of a city. All within a few hundred metres of vibrant neighbourhoods. So let's protect it.

With the current civic discussion on how we will accommodate more growth within our existing urban boundary, we should make sure to plan with our world biosphere reserve in mind.

This includes things like enhancing sustainable access to the reserve as a place for urban green space, as well as the protection of waterways that flow from the escarpment to the harbour, such as Chedoke Creek.

We should also protect some views to and from the escarpment and ensure that vertical sprawl doesn't crowd out this treasure.

This is not dissimilar to other progressive cities around the world that find ways to be compatible with local geological features and aim to protect their presence within their cities.

To be clear this isn't about limiting density, which will come in all shapes and sizes, from the "missing middle" on up. As mentioned countless times before, we should promote a whole host of building typologies — from duplexes and townhouses, to mid-rise and high-rises. Collectively, a combination of these types is how we will accommodate our growth.

What this is about is setting out the rules to protect the geological assets we value and then inviting development to be compatible with that. Fortunately, we have an opportunity to get this balance right, but it's important we consider this now because you only get one shot at protecting our geological architecture.

No matter how well-designed new buildings are, you are never going to out-design Mother Nature.

Needless to say, the consequences of not protecting the escarpment go way beyond recreational green space and beautiful views. The same elevation difference that gives us expansive vistas is also the reason why we have flooding in the lower city.

In fact, the climate emergency brings a whole new level of urgency on how we should learn to grow sustainably within our boundaries, with our biosphere reserve at the heart of our city.

PAUL SHAKER IS A HAMILTON-BASED URBAN PLANNER AND PRINCIPAL WITH CIVICPLAN.

Returning to school at last — in Uganda



THOMAS FROESE

OPINION

MUKONO, UGANDA You're riding on the back of a boda boda, not the safest place on the planet.

Paul manoeuvres the motorcycle through some wild traffic while you talk about the school lockdown that's finally over in this East African nation.

"Are you happy?" you ask. "So much," says Paul, and laughs. It's a moment. Paul has five children returning to class.

Yesterday, you asked the same to another Ugandan friend, 19-year-old Gloria. She's redoing her final high school year. You're helping her. Some response? "I'm so happy, Mr. Thom. I've been given an opportunity." Later, over your screen, Gloria says hello and thanks to your family back in Canada. It's another moment.

You happen to know a Ugandan whose name is Happy. Happy Grace. But who in this nation of 46 million wouldn't be happy? Uganda has endured what the UN reports as the world's longest school disruption, a full or partial shutdown that lasted 83 weeks. Your Children. At Home. For. Almost. Two. Years.

But visit now and see supplies like mattresses moving, often on someone's head, through the streets of

Uganda. It's a back-to-school tradition, a reminder of the millions of Ugandan children in boarding schools.

Your home, by the way, for this working visit is the university where you and your family had lived for 12 years. Someone recently called it "the coolest university south of the Sahara." Maybe it is. It's a respected learning centre that sits on 90 acres of rolling green hills near Uganda's capital, Kampala. "Come," you were told. "You can help." So you're here.

When the pandemic struck in 2020, this university of 12,000 was shuttered. Campus closed for 16 months. But students have now rolled in again. Rain or shine, as Uganda's president put it, the country will be open in 2022. This school is but one sign.

At its front gate you hear your name. "Thom! I didn't know you were here!" Soon after, with a couple of journalists, you're talking about stabilizing the campus newspaper. The only university paper in Uganda — there are over 50 universities nationwide — it published for 13 years before the pandemic killed its print edition.

The pandemic hit this region hardest in its second wave, last June. One educator tells you, "It seemed like just about everyone knew someone who'd died." And while online learning was possible for some, it wasn't for millions of others without the technological ways or means.

Some public schools had weeds growing in them. Now consider that almost half of all Ugandans are younger than 16. Education is no small deal here. And while the government has allowed all elementary and high school students to move ahead a year, it's unknown how many, unprepared, will falter. The pandemic has also led to a spike in teen pregnancies.

People here mask indoors. Outdoors, it's a mixed bag. The national curfew limiting night activities, especially bars, is also lifting. But boda drivers like Paul? For now, their taxi motorcycles remain banned between 7 p.m. and 5 a.m.

And the vaccine? At schools like this, a private Christian university, full vaccination is mandatory for staff and students. But national supplies can be low. Also, the infodemic's wonky thinking has hit this side of the ocean. Vaccination rates of Africa's 54 nations are among the world's lowest, below 20 per cent.

Now consider this. Uganda reports about 3,400 pandemic deaths. Canada, with eight million fewer people, reports almost 10 times that, about 32,000. Is this just due to under-reporting, common in developing nations? Is it the warm weather? The long school lockdown? The young populace? Do Africans have better natural immunity?

Whatever the case, it's an interesting sketch. A picture.

Now you're in the newsroom of that university paper, mentoring young writers. "Back home, some thought I was crazy to come here. They warned me. 'People aren't vaccinated there.'" You look around at those gathered. There's laughter. It's another moment.

THOMAS FROESE WRITES ABOUT NEWS, TRAVEL AND LIFE. FIND HIM AT THOMASFROESE.COM.