

LETTERS

Shallow Doug

I am aghast at the shameless cynicism displayed by Premier Doug Ford with his announcement cancelling/refunding licence plate fees.

Being long retired, we moved to Hamilton precisely because we choose not to run a car and we also believe in doing our part to protect the environment by taking transit and walking.

Ford addresses himself and this largesse to the 5,000,000 "hard-working folks" in Ontario who drive cars and need extra money, adding that they are likely to find better ways to spend it than the government!

More than two-thirds of the homes on our street are occupied by retired people, all of whom own vehicles.

My lovely retired, well-pensioned neighbour and his partner have two Jeeps, an SUV and a motorbike and will receive a rebate of approximately \$1,000, as well as pay nothing next year. We who are following the pleas to minimize our emissions footprint get no support or encouragement.

It seems that his focus and generosity extends to only some citizens in the province, perhaps those he hopes will elect him. Truly sickening!

Elaine Bowman, Hamilton

Health flaws

This pandemic has exposed the flaws in our health-care system. A few decades ago, the Ontario government of the time fired 7,000 nurses and shut down numerous hospital beds. In the years since, nothing has been done to repair the damage from those actions. Spaces in colleges and universities have not increased to fill the void that has been exacerbated by the stress, workload, mental and physical pressure on nurses. Availability of hospital beds was already a huge problem clogging up emergency departments with patients waiting for beds and forcing people to wait a ridiculous amount of time to be attended to. Maybe instead of giving billions to profitable corporations, the provincial government could start making up for the past. The people of Ontario are suffering, fix it.

Pat Stevens, Grimsby

Hard to believe

AIMCo, an Alberta Crown Corporation, is in the business of destroying the climate, precious wetlands and thousands of mature trees in two places that I care about.

One, the Garner Road marsh in the headwaters of Ancaster Creek. It's beautiful! AIMCo has purchased this property intending to convert most of the 85 acres into huge warehouses and parking lots.

Two, Wedzin Kwa (Morrice River), in Wet'su'veen unceded Indigenous lands (B.C.). You can drink this water!

AIMCo is the majority owner of the Coastal Gas-Link pipeline, which is bulldozing under this precious water and land, in order to transport fracked gas for export.

Both of these destructive developments so clearly put profits ahead of health and survival.

For survival, we need to be reducing greenhouse gas emissions, protecting against flooding, erosion and poisoning of air and water.

And preserving beauty, wildlife habitats and food sources. Is this still not obvious?

Rose Janson, Hamilton

Housing solutions

The majority of Hamiltonians decided that they did not want to expand our urban boundaries, and city council listened.

Yet, housing remains a problem. The solution is to repurpose our existing housing stock.

Change the zoning bylaws to allow rental units in single-family residences and garages, not only in the lower city, but also up the Mountain, and in Ancaster, Dundas, Stoney Creek and the rural areas of greater Hamilton.

Saying that this solution will create a "shantytown" is small-minded and regressive. Change is never easy. We must be courageous enough to reimagine our neighbourhoods as places that use the existing houses more efficiently and equitably.

Colleen Francisci, Hamilton

Praising Shkimba

Many thanks to Margaret Shkimba for her well-researched and informative articles in The Spec. I so much wish that the average Hamiltonian would take a personal interest in what is going on in their city, instead of constantly voting in the same people whose names they recognize on the ballot. Among others, Lloyd Ferguson seems to be able to hold on to his position, in spite of his lack of concern for the city of Hamilton as a whole. He will continue to support the expansion of housing projects into farmland and sensitive ecosystems for well-to-do families and business enterprises, without any concern for the disadvantaged, or even the average Hamiltonians, who are finding it increasingly difficult to get some kind of decent accommodation.

Gudrun Boehm-Johnson, Ancaster

Restore motel sign

Restore the City Motor Hotel sign? Yes, please. The sign is iconic. (It even stars in Olivier Assayas' "Clean," with Maggie Cheung and Nick Nolte.) But erasing the vintage lettering is an odd idea: art need not be functional. Why change an icon?

Narah Sheehan, Hamilton



THOMAS FROESE

A Ugandan woman holds an umbrella for cover under threatening clouds in Mukono, Uganda. The global pandemic is best understood by relating it to seasonal changes, writes Thomas Froese.

What living with it' looks like



THOMAS FROESE
OPINION

It was on the streets of Uganda with shoppers scurrying to beat the rain when the masked woman with the colourful umbrella passed me, or I passed her, a moment, like 10 million others, that would already be forgotten if not for my handy phone camera.

Later, in Kampala, reading a recent global edition of China Daily, I came across a photo of a Toronto-ian up to his neck in snow, his shovel in hand and task before him. It was a fun juxtaposition of a Canadian scene in a Chinese paper read in the heart of Africa. And a reminder of how, in our age of easy (dis) information, nobody's ever further than a sneeze away.

We're captivated, if not held captive, by the weather. For centuries, human survival revolved around weather and crops, even as our relationship with the weather, certainly during climate change, remains crucial.

I personally don't mind some rumbling clouds followed by an incessant downpour. Or not. What, now the sun? This is the weather in a place like Uganda. Very local. Very changeable. Forget your weather

app. There's rainy season. There's dry season. There's no freeze-thaw-snot-on-your-nose season. Like in much of the Global South — home to about 3.5 billion people — if it dips much below 20°C, you'll see the parkas and tuques come out.

This is the time to mention Canadian winters. "Really? Minus 10 degrees? Minus 20? Oh my!" There's no better way to transfix someone from a mild-weather nation. People (as the joke goes about the British, but it's not only the British) love to talk about the weather, even if they don't do anything about it.

Which, speaking of the pandemic, is getting to today's point. Oh, we weren't speaking about the pandemic? Well let's. Because isn't this a reasonable and helpful way to understand it, like the seasons we know so well?

Restrictions are lifting. Finally. Again. Spring, in plenty of places, is on the way. In Ontario, a simple restaurant meal with a friend or loved one who never got jabbed is around the sunny corner. Catch a movie. A game. A concert. Throw a big house party. Forget bra burnings, how about burning our masks? Maybe? Sometime? Let's hope.

Even so, there's still this inconvenient truth that the pandemic did to what it wants despite our hopeful forecasts. Not that there's anything wrong with the mantra, "We

need to learn to live with it." It's true. We do. This is why we have umbrellas and shovels. Vaccines, restrictions and masking have helped keep us at least half dry, and helped us dig out of the worst.

In the last global pandemic 100 years ago, with no vaccine cover, about 50 million people perished. This time with COVID-19 vaccines? About six million to date. And the science — thank God for it — is still our best barometer of tomorrow. Consider about 2.8 billion people worldwide have received no vaccine and, globally, there's no herd immunity. So another variant can still arrive in 2022.

And it may or may not be gentle. Remember, Omicron didn't come from Delta, but another branch of the coronavirus family tree. So as we open with the view that we're nearing the endemic stage, let's remember that seasons can change.

Consider also that "full" vaccination gave about 80 per cent protection against Delta, but against boosters, just 30 per cent against Omicron. So be ready. This is what many scientists are maintaining, including several who recently spoke to the U.K.'s Guardian newspaper. "Living with it" means more boosters for future variants.

In the meantime, the scientists keep working on a single universal vaccine. This, so we can stop the endless game of whack-a-mole with Alpha or Beta or Delta or you-name-the-variant, and stand safe under a larger, more protective roof. But building that cover takes time.

Will it take a year? Two? Also unknown. So let's enjoy where we are. But keep our bearings.

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

Tales of freedom on Family Day weekend



DEIRDRE PIKE
OPINION

Although I was free to leave at any time, I was glued to Canada's public broadcaster during Family Day weekend, becoming a virtual witness to the experiences families were having here and there in the world. The differences were extreme.

On one hand, families and teachers in Ukraine used their remaining days of freedom to prepare their children for the imminent Russian invasion, with "duck and cover" drills.

On the other hand, some Canadian families were recorded freely taking their children into the heart of this nation's capital, where the military precision of a war zone led by police units from across Ontario and Quebec, was unfolding before our collective eyes.

While some parents in Ukraine had to use their freedom to apply stickers to their children with life-saving information like name and blood type, "just in case," some freely protesting parents in Canada, chose to take their unlabelled children to the bouncy castle in the heavily guarded Parliament precinct, where area residents were no longer free or safe to roam.

Though the castle had been deflat-

ed on Friday night in the opening acts of dismantling the three-week long occupation, the parents returned on Saturday with un-deflated determination. Some towed their small charges in sleds through crowds of people, many of whom shouted any of the lines of the national anthem they could recall, like a giant curse at the officers who held their gazes and their arms.

This Thursday past, on the official first day of the Russian assault on Ukraine with multiple deadly weapons, the death toll rose from the first eight unnamed humans to over 40, in just three early morning hours in which I had risen to pen this piece, freely and without fear.

In Ottawa, the children and their families made it out physically unharmed. How they will remember and interpret their experiences remains to be seen. They could have traumatic memories of stampede-like conditions as the hundreds of police on foot joined by those on horseback and in tank-like vehicles, made their hasty approaches to push the crowd away from Parliament Hill.

Taking in the venomous reactions to the reporters and camera operators from the CBC and other mainstream media outlets would be traumatic enough, unparalleled as it was in quantity, decibels and physical threat, from previous times when reporters were free to do their jobs in public.

In Hamilton's attempt at a wan-

nabe convoy Feb. 5, at least one reporter experienced this same kind of reaction from the hometown crowd. Diana Weeks, senior news anchor at Global News Radio 900 CHML, showed up to speak to some of the 200 or so people driving in cars and pickups past city hall for an hour or so before police rerouted them for a shorter run around Bay.

"As a journalist, I went to cover the #convoyprotest outside #Hamont city hall, with an open mind... What I got was a slew of verbal harassment; was screamed at two inches from my face... and was told I was a puppet for Trudeau. All I wanted, was to get their side."

With some Ottawa occupiers demanding "first amendment rights," it is clear they are watching too much Fox News. This week, CNN corrected at least three false news claims from Fox, including one of a protester being trampled by a horse.

Back in Ukraine, CBC reporters who are currently free and still safe enough to do their work, engage with Grade 8 students about their preparation. They talk about the psychologists who have come into their classrooms to reassure them.

"We are not as worried as (the grown-ups are)," student Ivan Trostnyuk states. "I think everything is going to be all right."

I long for your confidence, Ivan. The kids may still be all right, but too many grown-ups are quite wrong.

DEIRDRE PIKE IS A FREELANCE COLUMNIST WITH THE HAMILTON SPECTATOR. YOU CAN REACH HER AT DEIRDREPIKE@GMAIL.COM. TO LEARN MORE ABOUT PRINCIPLED JOURNALISM, CHECK OUT THE TRUST PROJECT AT THE TRUST PROJECT.ORG. @GREGBANNING FOR @CTVOTTAWA.

