

LETTERS

Bidders gaming the system

Re: Fire damage to a simple public bathroom is half a million bucks? (Jan. 12)

We may have to cancel our subscription to The Spectator. I'm not sure my blood pressure can handle much more of this type of information. Scott Radley identifies many of the reasons why project costs are out of sight in Hamilton, but misses an important one, and here I speak from experience. Bidders on public-sector projects know the project is going to go forward, come hell or high water. This is not necessarily the case in the private sector. If, for example, a private-sector company needs to build a new facility or expand an existing one and the bids come in — and it believes they are too high — it can opt not to go ahead with the project or have it rebid. This is not the case with the public sector and bidders know this. It does result in higher bids for public-sector projects. So one possibility is when the public sector issues requests for quotes or tenders on a project, they stipulate they have the right to not accept any of the bids and have the right to re-tender, if that is not already being done. And from time to time, they should exercise that right and not proceed with the project. Just to keep bidders on their toes.
Richard Ronchka, Carlisle

This is why our taxes are high

Re: Fire damage to a simple public bathroom is half a million bucks? (Jan. 12)

Why does it cost \$500,000 to replace a public washroom at Woodlands Park? This is why our taxes are ridiculously high. Find a cheaper solution. Sorry, but taxpayers are sick of writing blank cheques for city expenditures. I wish council would do things within their means like anyone who follows a budget. Find a cost-effective way to deal with things instead of just writing a cheque. Same goes for the police budget. Work within your means the way the rest of society does.
Robin Magder, Dundas

It's somebody else's money

Re: Fire damage to a simple public bathroom is half a million bucks? (Jan. 12)

While reading this column, I was reminded of what economist Milton Friedman stated in his book, "Free to Choose." "Spending somebody else's money on somebody else doesn't result in the most efficient use of funds. There's just too much economic waste." This is the case with politicians using our money for public expenditures at all levels of government. As Friedman explains, they do not necessarily have the same incentive for cost management and value when they spend our money, compared to when they spend their own money on themselves or others.
Mark Melanson, Hamilton

Wisdom of our youth

Re: The problem with today (Jan. 12)

Congratulations to Grade 10 student Madison Heise for a thoughtful and well-written column. We are all somebody and can each do something to help with the problems we face. Youth like you give hope for a better future.
Sharon McKibbin, Hamilton

We can all do something

Martha Howat ("Litter in Hamilton is out of control"), please read the opinion piece by Madison Heise ("The problem with today"). Especially the last paragraph: "Lily Tomlin once said, 'I always wondered why somebody doesn't do something about that. Then I realized I was somebody.' You are somebody, too."
Patricia Campion, Hamilton

Our survival under threat

Re: A father's new year resolution to challenge efforts to derail climate action (Jan. 11)

Thank you for Christopher Holcroft's column, a graphic outline of our current environmental crisis, which Pierre Poilievre, the leader of the Opposition, father of two young children, refuses to take seriously. Sadly, a large number of Canadians support Poilievre's irresponsible rants, without giving any thought to how they are thereby securing, if not augmenting, the immense wealth of foreign-owned companies, while our survival and that of our children and grandchildren, in fact all life on this planet Earth, is threatened.
Gudrun Boehm-Johnson, Ancaster

A question of responsibility

Re: Killer of Grimsby grandmother found not criminally responsible (Jan. 11)

Sonya Sekhon has been found not criminally responsible for the death of Elaine Ladouceur. The reason for this sentencing is because of her schizoaffective disorder. Her condition was treated and kept stable by the antipsychotic drug clozapine. However, the fact that she was no longer taking her medication resulted in her disorder being untreated and her disorder controlling her behaviour. So who is responsible for ensuring that individuals with serious mental disorders take the necessary medications to control their disorders? The medical system? The criminal justice system? If the necessary changes are not made to ensure the safety of the public, we will continue to have more senseless and tragic deaths of members of our communities.
Mary Elizabeth Toth, Ancaster



THOMAS FROESE PHOTO

An array of faces are displayed in the Canadian Museum for Human Rights in Winnipeg. Commenting on faces and the new year, Thomas Froese writes, "If we're interested in things like beauty and truth in this wobbly, old world, it seems to me that anyone need not look further than the human face."

Looking outward with grace



THOMAS FROESE
OPINION

It's still that time for resolutions, or at least new year reflections. But before I share what I'd like to improve on during my own 2024, let me say that I recently looked at a woman sitting across a restaurant table and talking — well, complaining — to me. I looked at her face. Some context. I enjoy people-watching. When I'm in cafés or other public places, like the nearby park, I'll easily invest the time to watch and wait for, maybe, someone in a conversation to smile, or even break out in laughter.

It's a remarkable thing to watch someone laugh without care. I think there's a beauty in it. And this is important, at least if we put stock in what Dostoevsky said in one of his novels, that "Beauty will save the world."

The Russian writer was alluding to the deeper and more mysterious beauty of Christ's incarnation. But, broadly speaking, if we're interested in things like beauty and truth in this wobbly, old world, it seems to me that anyone need not look further than the human face.

There are now about eight billion faces around this world. Many are beautiful. The woman across the table from me, I imagine, once had such a beautiful face. At least in the conventional sense. Her younger

version likely attracted some so-called male gazes. But along her way she'd lost something. Inside. And her face showed it.

This is what Abraham Lincoln meant when he once told a friend that he disliked a certain person because of his face. The friend found this dreadful, retorting that nobody can be held responsible for his or her face.

On the contrary, said Lincoln. Anyone with adequate life experience is completely responsible for the face that they present to the world.

Funny enough, Lincoln — who had health conditions and was once kicked in the head by a horse — had a face that nobody would put on the cover of GQ magazine. Even so, that well-known face still radiated a gentle and disarming likeability. The woman across from me had a different face, one I'd never imagine in laughter, never mind laughter with any abandonment.

So be careful what thoughts you allow to churn inside your head. Because if you think horrible and ridiculous and ungracious thoughts for long enough, with each passing year your face will become more horrible and ridiculous and ungracious. (Oscar Wilde's novel "The Picture of Dorian Gray" explores these important matters rather nicely if you're looking to add to your 2024 book list.)

On the other hand, fill your mind with gracious thoughts, and, you get the idea. It's cause-and-effect. This is the universe's mechanism.

We become, for better or worse, the choices that we surround ourselves with.

In one fascinating variation on this, some spouses can even look more like each other as the years go by, developing similar facial features as they grow in empathy and love for each other. The phenomena is called emphatic mimicry. (This isn't to be confused with the phenomena of dogs and owners sometimes looking similar, which is called mere exposure effect. It's likely caused by people unwittingly choosing dogs that resemble themselves, especially around the eyes.)

So what's my aspiration for my own 2024?

Just to look at people's faces better. In the eyes. It doesn't come naturally. A painfully shy boy, I only changed, somewhat, after entering the world of newspapers and realizing that I'd be a rather hopeless reporter if I couldn't look at people.

Further, on another level, if we're going to love our neighbour — and let's assume most of us want to at least get along with our neighbour, even for our own self-interest — then we first need to look at our neighbour.

Even those neighbours who are less than beautiful.

Then maybe we'll see them with compassion, one half-blind human to another, looking outward with grace. This too is something to work on. For anyone. Any year. Certainly 2024 needs it.

READ THOMAS FROESE AT THOMASFROESE.COM.

Canadian workers with two jobs could use a break

JASON DEAN

If you need two jobs to cover your bills, maybe the government should be a bit less greedy with you around tax season.

It's no secret that the rise in the cost of living has been hitting Canadian families hard, and we've all been looking for ways to save on our expenses to keep them in line with our incomes.

Unfortunately, cutting back on some expenses hasn't been enough for all our fellow citizens. As a result, the number of Canadians taking on a second job in addition to their main full-time job has increased in recent years.

Today, the number of moonlighting Canadians is estimated to be more than 658,000. That's equivalent to the population of Brampton, the ninth largest city in the country, according to the latest census.

These are people who have to work a combined total of more than 35 hours per week just to make ends meet. As you might expect, it's not so much the people earning six figures that are taking on this secondary employment, but rather the folks in or near the bottom and lower-middle income brackets.

Unfortunately, the way things stand the income taxes on their second jobs are hitting them hard. That's because the way our tax system is set up doesn't differentiate between primary and secondary employment.

It just keeps adding things up and

increasing the marginal rate you have to pay.

To illustrate what this means, consider a single Ontarian who earns \$35,000 a year in their main employment, but who still needs a second job to make ends meet. The provincial and federal governments will take at least 20.5 cents out of every dollar they earn in that secondary employment.

For the average worker in this situation, their second income brings in a little more than \$18,000 according to Statistics Canada. And out of that \$18,000, they end up paying more than \$3,700 in taxes.

Of course, the exact amount varies by province, but no matter where in the country they live, it's still a significant amount of money that they could be using for other purposes. But instead of putting it toward the rent, paying for groceries, or paying off credit card debt, they are forced to send it straight into government coffers.

A good way to change that would be for our governments to reset the marginal tax calculations for people who have two jobs, with one of them being full time.

This would mean restarting the income tax ladder at zero and considering their secondary income in a silo, so that every extra dollar earned wouldn't be subject to a tax rate of 20 per cent or more.

To understand this policy's effect, let's look at our average Ontarian moonlighter earning an annual \$35,000 in their main job and \$18,000 in their secondary job. Our

proposed tax reset would leave them with \$2,722 extra in their pockets at the end of the year compared to what they have now.

With the cost of living what it is today, you'd be hard-pressed to find any Canadian who would snicker at the idea of a \$2,722 bonus. This is even truer among people at the lower to lower-middle end of the income scale.

While this represents a significant sum to each of the 658,000 Canadians living this scenario, it's also an amount that would barely make a scratch on federal and provincial revenues.

At the federal level, for instance, providing such a tax reset would represent a \$981-million drop in revenue. This might seem like a lot, but it's almost invisible beside the \$489 billion the government projects to spend this year.

Looked at another way, the amount is slightly less than the production subsidies Ottawa has pledged to send to one company, battery manufacturer Stellantis, every year for the next decade.

If Ottawa can extend such magnanimity to a single foreign battery manufacturer, surely it can find a way to help 658,000 hard-working Canadians by providing them with a tax reset on their second jobs.

JASON DEAN IS AN ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF ECONOMICS AT KING'S UNIVERSITY COLLEGE AT WESTERN ONTARIO AND AN ASSOCIATE RESEARCHER AT THE MONTREAL ECONOMIC INSTITUTE.