

LETTERS

Roads come before people

Re: New accelerated timeline for two-way Main Street conversion (Feb. 21)

Once again, the front-page story is about turning Main Street into a two-way thoroughfare for the measly sum of only \$26.5 million.

So excited is our city council to spend this money that they have accelerated the timeline and, to do that, have decided to single-source \$1 million to a particular consultant, “thus avoiding a lengthier request-for-proposals period.” What’s wrong with spending a bit of time having a request-for-proposals period to ensure the integrity of the project?

Meanwhile, our city is covered with the tents of the homeless. Real people, hurting. What kind of society worries more about — and spends more money on — turning a street into two ways instead of one way? What sort of society doesn’t put actual human beings first, not last?

If I had my druthers, council would be locked in a room (or maybe a tent would be more appropriate) without food and water until they actually addressed the homelessness issue.

Maybe the single-sourced consultant for Main Street’s new design can include a large, unserviced area for the tents of the homeless, because with the decisions council has been making (or not) will ensure the need for a very large space for tents.

Suzie Scott, Hamilton

Parking comes before people

Re: Plan to use Stoney Creek parking lot for housing rejected (Feb. 21)

My mouth is hanging open and I’m aghast at the decision of city council to vote in favour of protecting parking spaces rather than provide affordable housing for 67 people/families.

When we see all the tent encampments and the huge number of homeless people in the city, this is simply an unconscionable decision on the part of our city councillors.

Please, please before the final vote next week, give your heads a shake and do the right thing. Take a drive around and see all those poor souls who are without a roof over their heads, then take a look at the parking lots full of empty cars and ask yourselves, which of those sights is more in need of being protected and taken care of?

Ruth Van Horne, Hamilton

Show some fiscal restraint

Re: Trims to police budget rejected (Feb. 13)

Could someone please explain to me how delaying the paving of a parking lot, which was determined to be in fair condition, will put the public’s safety at risk?

What it would do is show Hamilton residents that the Hamilton Police Service and its board understand the need for some fiscal restraint during this budget season. Instead, they continue in their tone-deaf approach by not even considering any cuts to their ask.

Some would say that the \$500,000 saved this budget would be nothing more than a drop in the bucket and mean little in overall savings. All we asked was to help find ways to lessen the impact of this budget, one drop at a time.

Don Holland, Hamilton

Best to find alternate route

I fail to understand why people use the Hunter GO station in Hamilton to and from the airport. Letters published recently indicate shuttered washrooms, navigational nightmares, lack of lighting and the unhouseed using their own means of bathroom facilities — namely a cup.

If people can afford to travel, then they can most likely afford to hire a service for airport travel because the last thing you want after a long trip is to be faced with such deplorable conditions.

Remind me again why we pay such exorbitant taxes.

Linda Ferrie, Waterdown

GO station needs attention

We are 80-plus seniors using the GO bus to Pearson from the Hunter Street terminal for travel also. It could be wonderful, but we agree with Enid Aaron that the times it is open, it is disgraceful, inconvenient and not properly noted when ticket is purchased.

A few years ago, we also had been dropped at the Hunter Street door at night, close to bus departure, only to find it closed with no idea what to do.

The walk around and uphill was more than annoying with luggage and aging knees. GO and HSR need to get their act together if this is still going on.

Rick and Barb Bodner, Ancaster

Have empathy for homeless

Re: Hunter GO station a no go (Feb. 22)

I just thought I’d reply to Ed Tymkow’s letter from Feb. 22. It certainly is unfortunate that you couldn’t use the bathroom after returning from your vacation and using the GO bus from Pearson. Your comment drips with privilege and a lack of empathy.

I’d suggest that maybe after seeing what the GO station was like the week before, which I assume was on your way to Pearson for your vacation, maybe you should have considered another option on your trip home?

Luckily for you, it seems you could probably afford it.

Simon Carroll, Hamilton

Hijacked faith fuels Trump



THOMAS FROESE
OPINION

An American I know once told me that if your house is on fire then you don’t care much about a firefighter’s faults. You only care that they’ve arrived to put the fire out.

Then she explained how Donald Trump was the only firefighter in town who could save America from the fire of itself.

I wonder what St. Francis of Assisi would say. (More on Francis in a minute.)

That firefighter conversation unfolded before the 2016 U.S. election, about the time when, at a Christian university in Iowa, Trump made the bizarre remark that if he shot someone in the middle of Manhattan’s Fifth Avenue he still wouldn’t lose supporters. Apparently he was right.

Now here we go again. Trump still says wild things. (Let the Russians do “whatever the hell they want” with delinquent NATO nations). This, while the law catches up with him, now with 91 felony charges in four criminal indictments. Yet we’re still looking down the barrel of Trump 2.0. Bewildered Canadians wonder as much as anyone what it might mean for them.

Because firefighters aren’t all the same. Some — have you read the novel “Fahrenheit 451?” — go and start fires to begin their day before explaining to you that up is down, and down is up, and the burning house now needs saving.

So in 2024 we’re left, it seems to me, with two questions. (Besides “What would Francis say?”)

First, in an innovative nation of 330 million people, why can’t anyone find one worthy Democrat opponent who’s not an aging, frail man to keep Trump, an aging dangerous man, from the White House and the red button? America’s two-party system needs reform.

And second, how many evangelical Christians, perceived or real, will vote for Trump this time?

In 2016 plenty did. It mattered little how depraved he acted, how much he threatened or mocked opponents (or innocents), how he degraded women — remember the “Access Hollywood” tapes? — or how unhinged he appeared. Trump was, apparently, on the right side of the culture wars. Plus, he’d save America from outsiders. He would



CHRIS CARLSON GETTY IMAGES FILE PHOTO

In 2016, it mattered little how depraved Donald Trump acted, how much he threatened or mocked opponents, how he degraded women or how unhinged he appeared. Trump was, apparently, on the right side of the culture wars, Thomas Froese writes.

build walls. Big walls. Literal and figurative.

So, in 2016, 81 per cent of white evangelicals, about one-fifth of American voters, helped make firefighter Trump the president. In 2020, when then 78-year-old Joe Biden became president, Trump’s white evangelical vote exit-pollled 75 per cent.

It’s the odd truth. Americans carrying Christ’s name, at least some of them, people you’d imagine would want to at least learn to walk in Jesus’s footsteps, have left the historic, global faith and its theological understanding in favour of something else, namely a strange brew of consumer culture and Christian nationalism.

And this subculture of toxic, even hijacked, faith helps fuel Trump. Jesus, you see, didn’t carry his cross and lay down his life for the redemption of all things. No, Jesus wore a hat that says “God, Guns and Trump,” the sort you might see at the deadly 2021 insurrection in Washington.

So who’s St. Francis of Assisi? He’s the historic figure, an Italian, still

celebrated for his faithful commitment, for leaving wealth and family for a life of Christian service, especially to the poor. His life remains an example, and corrective, for modern believers anywhere.

Today, Feb. 24, is the day remembered as the start of his vocational ministry in 1208. It was a long time ago, for sure. Which is to say, how many of us will be remembered for 800 years?

What would Francis say now? God knows. But maybe something like this.

“Get small. Hold things lightly. Pursue wisdom. Love your maker. Serve others. Don’t overcomplicate life. You’re here just briefly, so make the most of it. Don’t build walls. Take walls down. Or go over them. Or under. Or around.”

Maybe he’d also say that no group of people, like no individual, is locked into mistaken ways.

That’s the beauty of free will. It just takes courage to look in the mirror, unravel things, and go the other way.

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Are self-checkouts anti-social?

JOHN R. GIBB

Can a thing such as an automated checkout station be viewed as anti-social? If not, what about the social consequences of the creation and application of such a thing?

Automation has a long and well-documented history as a double-edged sword. Along with its many benefits of convenience, it has been primarily a means to reduce labour costs and thus increase profits within capitalist economies. Self-checkouts are no exception.

Contrary to claims of improved customer experience, cutting staff hours and positions is the key to their existence. It’s simply shareholders vs. shoppers, no more, no less.

OK, you’ve selected your items at your local big chain store. You may proceed to the traditional checkout counter staffed by a live cashier or to the self-checkout machine. What choice do you make and why?

Let’s back up a minute. Some choices appear to be taken away from us, but are they really? Readers will recall there were more independent family-run stores not all that long ago. Many have disappeared mysteriously, or did they? Maybe it had something to do with the arrival of the Home Depot, Walmart or other big-box stores? The cause and effect was obvious — our choice to shop there instead closed our local stores.

This was not unexpected; head offices banked on it.

What about the mysterious disappearance of a number of friendly faces at our Metro, Shoppers Drug

Mart or other store having self-checkouts? Where are the part-time students on evenings and weekends? Isn’t staff just re-assigned? Who are we kidding here? It’s not so mysterious after all. These retailers counted on our “co-operation” and compliance. They assumed we would not question their “solution” to a deliberately created problem: longer lines at fewer staffed checkouts.

In “The Overworked Consumer: Self-Checkouts, Supermarkets, and the Do-It-Yourself Economy,” Christopher K. Andrews wrote: “A four-station, one-attendant configuration is claimed to save at least one 150 labour hours a week.” Mention of any benefits to the customer is noticeably absent.

Metro’s head office has closed all staffed checkouts until 9 a.m., Monday to Thursday. Imagine trying to self-check and bag any quantity of groceries, let alone a full cart! Attempts to speak with a human via Metro’s customer care number for comment all failed.

In addition to reducing our employment opportunities, do self-checkouts make it harder to connect meaningfully with others?

“We live in a digital world; just short of being pixelated or virtual ourselves, the things around us continue to get smarter, faster, more connected becoming increasingly more digital. Customer relationships are digital; business channels are digital; our conversations are digital, and our social interactions are slowly being affected by this digital world,” writes Nicki Giladi in 2018’s “Digital Society.”

Toni Antonucci of the University of Michigan agrees, saying that “for many, interacting with a familiar cashier is a cherished part of their day. Those kinds of human connections are becoming increasingly difficult to maintain, especially for those who grew up in an analog world.”

“Regular interactions we have in our communities including those at store checkout counters are important. Referred to as “weak ties” — low-stakes, friendly relationships that come out of daily life — help maintain our well-being. It’s somebody who makes you feel important in their world,” she continued. “Somebody who makes you feel human.”

In 2021 the highly automated Dutch grocery chain Jumbo introduced 200 “chat registers” for customers who aren’t in a hurry and want to have a chat during checkout. It’s part of the government-sponsored “One Against Loneliness” program.

Self-checkouts appear to be here to stay, but total automation does not have to be inevitable. Highly questionable facial recognition AI or “Face Pay” does not have to take over. Boycotting self-checkouts has already encouraged some chains like Walmart to re-staff their counters.

Our conscious and collective action will ensure that we continue to have a choice for the sake of our own health and to support our neighbours’ employment.

Just imagine!
JOHN R. GIBB IS AN ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL JUSTICE ADVOCATE.