

From bunkers to bonding



THOMAS FROESE
OPINION

Here's something on the always relevant topic of how to have a slumber party with a world leader. But first let's touch on bunkers and surviving the apocalypse.

Today is the anniversary of D-Day, the June 6, 1944, Allied invasion that helped end the Second World War, but not all war. This is why people want bunkers.

Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg, for example, has talked about one at his Hawaiian ranch. Nothing extravagant, just 5,000 square feet. "Just like a little shelter," he explained to Bloomberg about his plans.

About \$50,000 (U.S.) plus rent and fees gets more ordinary people a more modest bunker at Vivos xPoint in South Dakota, the world's largest survival community. A gym and restaurant are still coming, but if a nuke drops, your flabby and hungry self already has the bunker.

D-Day soldiers at Normandy's beaches would have appreciated a bunker. About 156,000 landed, mostly American, British and Canadian. More than 4,000 were killed. There are ordinary people, then there are ordinary people doing extraordinary things in horrible times.

Large and small, there are now about 130 armed conflicts globally. That's double from 15 years ago and the most since the Second World War. Conflict has forced about 125 million people from their homes, according to the International Committee of the Red Cross.

A noteworthy Canadian organization researching these conflicts and advocating for peace is Project Ploughshares, based at the University of Waterloo. It's now 50, birthed in 1976 by activists Ernie Regehr, a Mennonite, and Murray Thomson, a Quaker, both with pacifist world views. Ploughshares also lobbies for a global ban on nuclear weapons.

The apocalypse can arrive in any number of ways — or course, Albert Einstein is often quoted as saying that while he didn't know how the Third World War will be fought, the fourth would be with sticks and stones. During our era of rearmament and growing military budgets, that should give us all some pause. Nations beef up their weapons, presumably, to use them.

But about this sleeper with a world leader. After al-Qaida's terrorist attacks on the United States on Sept. 11, 2001, one American dad, Bob Goff, sat down with his three kids and asked what ideas they had to help.

The seven-year-old boy suggested inviting world leaders over to talk. His older brother said these leaders should openly share their hopes for their countries. The girl, the oldest, said let's go interview them at their homes if they can't come to ours.

So on the CIA website — it's cia.gov if you ever want to do this yourself — they found all the world's presidents, prime ministers, princes and dictators. Then they wrote each and invited themselves over. No agenda. Just friendship.

Most, like the UK's then prime minister Tony Blair, declined politely. Still, he wrote something like "Jolly good idea about meeting." And 29 leaders said, sure, come over. Really? Really. One teacher didn't like all the upcoming missed school. Dad wrote the teacher "tough."

Goff's book, "Love Does," notes how these leaders often told his kids what they themselves enjoyed as children. One, a stout, grave-looking man with a Russian accent, said meeting the children made him more nervous than meeting U.S. president George W. Bush.

"And when I get nervous, I get hungry!" Then he clapped his hands and out came the food. Kids food. Strawberry tarts and pastries and whipping cream and mountains of ice cream. You can't make up this stuff.

The children presented each leader they met with a small red box holding their house key as an open-ended sleeper invitation back home. One eventually wrote to tell the children how much they were missed. "Can we please use our key and come over for a sleeper?" Then they did.

It's a wild story about ordinary people and a certain anti-bunker approach to life, putting yourself out there without fear. Cynics will, naturally, call it crazy and naive. That's because they don't understand the power of children, never mind peace.

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THE HAMILTON SPECTATOR FILE PHOTO

Minutes before landing on the coast of Normandy on June 6, 1944 for D-Day, the expressions on the faces of these Canadian soldiers ranged from brightly cheerful to grimly serious.



CATHIE COWARD/THE HAMILTON SPECTATOR FILE PHOTO

A healthy city requires both order and compassion. But order cannot simply mean moving vulnerable people out of sight or into someone else's neighbourhood, Mark Chamberlain writes.

Encampments are not the problem

MARK CHAMBERLAIN

Walk through almost any Hamilton neighbourhood close to the downtown core and the evidence is visible.

People are sleeping in doorways, under bridges and in parks. Encampments were not there five years ago. A homelessness crisis has moved from the margins of public conversation to the centre of it.

Many people want to know why. Some put the blame on too much compassion. Some blame the people themselves. All residents want them gone from their neighbourhood.

But encampments are not the problem. They are the symptom of a problem Hamilton has known about and documented for a long time.

The Spectator's Code Red series, published in 2010, delivered a clear diagnosis when the determinants of health — income, housing, food security, education, early childhood development and social connection — are inadequately supported, the consequences are severe and measurable.

A life expectancy gap of more than 20 years, between Hamilton's lower-income downtown neighbourhoods and more affluent suburban ones, is devastating but not visible on the street.

Fifteen years later, those same determinants remain underfunded. Their consequences have become more acute, more widespread and impossible to ignore. What Code Red showed in health data is now visible in doorways, parks, emer-

gency rooms and encampments.

Encampments are not a new crisis. They are the visible expression of a much deeper one.

A recent court ruling in Waterloo Region brought these questions into sharp focus. When a judge ruled the region could not remove between 30 and 40 people from an encampment without providing adequate alternatives, outrage followed. Many asked how these vulnerable people could delay a major transit project.

That is the wrong question.

The court did not create homelessness, addiction, untreated mental illness or encampments. Nor was it asked whether encampments are acceptable long-term public policy. They are not.

The question was whether governments can remove people when no realistic alternative exists. That is not radical compassion. That is the Charter doing what it is supposed to do when government failure puts life, dignity and security of the person at risk.

We would never blame a thermometer for revealing a fever. Yet the reaction to the Waterloo Region ruling does exactly that.

A healthy city requires both order and compassion. Businesses, residents, workers and families deserve safe, clean and functional public spaces. But order cannot simply mean moving vulnerable people out of sight or into someone else's neighbourhood.

Compassion without order fails the public. Order without compassion fails the person.

What that balance requires is a

long-term strategy to invest in people. Not measures to manage symptoms but immediate supports connected to sustained investments in income, housing, food security, education, early childhood development, health care and social connection.

Every person stabilized, housed and supported has a greater opportunity to improve their health, participate in community life and contribute where they can. Investment in human health does not compete with prosperity. It is its foundation.

The National Council of Welfare's 2011 report, "The Dollars and Sense of Solving Poverty," warned poverty is extraordinarily expensive. More than a decade later, Ontario is proving the point.

The Association of Municipalities of Ontario reported more than 80,000 Ontarians experienced homelessness in 2024, up 25 per cent in two years, while governments spent \$4.1 billion on housing and homelessness programs. Much of that money manages crisis after people have already lost housing, health and stability.

AMO estimates \$11 billion invested over 10 years could end chronic homelessness and \$2 billion over eight years could largely eliminate encampments.

The question is whether we keep paying downstream to manage symptoms or invest upstream to prevent them.

If we are going to reduce the delayed Waterloo Region transit project to a number, it isn't 30 or 40 vulnerable individuals. The number is 79 governing MPPs who have chosen, year after year, not to make the investments required to the scale necessary to reduce homelessness and prevent encampments from becoming last-resort shelter.

Ontario's priorities are clear. This government found billions for alcohol expansion, a relocated Science Centre and Ontario Place infrastructure, which included a parking garage and private spa.

Yet it has not invested at the scale required in a human crisis visible in encampments and homelessness and hidden in inadequate Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program rates and low-wage precarious work. All of these factors contribute to poorer health, shorter lives and higher health-care costs.

Ontario can mobilize billions when something matters. But when it comes to people, it funds the consequences more readily than the solutions. Then it blames the most vulnerable individuals in the province when their survival in an encampment becomes our inconvenience.

The Waterloo Region decision did not create the crisis. It exposed a failure that has never met a moral or fiscal standard and has now failed a human rights standard in court.

MARK CHAMBERLAIN IS A FORMER CHAIR OF THE HAMILTON ROUND-TABLE FOR POVERTY REDUCTION AND FORMER MEMBER OF THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF WELFARE.

LETTERS

Premier only cares about Toronto

Re: Carney promises 'consultation process' for Billy Bishop airport, June 5

If the people of Hamilton think the premier of Toronto cares about Hamilton, think again. He wants to expand the Billy Bishop airport when the Hamilton airport would be a better choice. Now he is going to take over roadways in Toronto, all to keep his buddies rich. People keep saying he is Captain Canada, but he is all Toronto.
Peter Colley, Hamilton

It's the Wild West on our roads

The 2026 Hamilton Police Service budget as stated on the City of Hamilton website is \$239 million, an increase of 6.81 per cent from 2025 (an increase of \$15.2 million). Why is it, then, when travelling across the city on major roadways, covering over 100 kilometres from Stoney Creek to Ancaster and Dundas on Tuesday, did I not see one police cruiser?
On my journey, I was followed

so closely on the Line I could not see the grille of the car behind me. I witnessed a woman out of her car and yelling at no one because we were held up for two minutes with construction in Ancaster. I saw a young person on a motorcycle, weaving in and out of traffic in Dundas, and finally, on Rymal Road, a pickup truck passing every car he could at a high rate of speed, only to have the traffic catch up with him at the next traffic light.

Hamilton's police service seems too focused on making downtown look crime-free, while leaving the roadways looking like the Wild West. Do better, Hamilton police.
Lorraine Stevens, Stoney Creek

Let farmers manage their own land

Re: Farmers challenge penalty for axed trees, June 2
The city should focus on fining developers who want to clear-cut trees to make way for subdivisions and condos, not a local farmer who knows the land and is clearing trees off his own property to expand his hay production.
Since when did the city become

more knowledgeable than a family who has been farming for 225 years?

Diana MacKenzie, Hamilton

Ford views debate as an inconvenience

Re: Legislature rises for 21-week break following short session, June 2

Premier Doug Ford is quoted as saying, "We're going at full steam rather than sitting here and arguing with each other." Apparently, the premier's preference is to dispense with the inconvenience of legislative debate (excuse me, "arguing with each other") and not be hampered by that particular mainstay of parliamentary democracy that provides for hearing the voices of the whole electorate.

I'm sure the premier and his government will enjoy their five-month adjournment.
James McKnight, St. Catharines

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