

EDITORIAL

Lost in translation

There is an expected level of trust between a candidate and voters whenever someone offers themselves up for public office.

For the most part the candidate provides his or her beliefs, ideas and plans to the voter which can be accepted or rejected. The candidate also lays bare who they are, sometimes warts and all, and allows the voter to judge.

It can be a stark and humbling experience.

Recently, a number of candidates have experienced the humiliation and embarrassment over things they'd done in the past thanks largely to social media. There was Conservative candidate Jerry Bance, who was caught on camera peeing into a homeowner's coffee cup; Tim Dutaud, another Tory candidate who was unveiled making prank YouTube videos pretending to orgasm. There was Ala Buzreba, a Liberal candidate in Calgary who had made cutting comments on Twitter as a teen; and Morgan Wheeldon, an NDP candidate in Nova Scotia, who made comments on social media about Israel. All these candidates eventually resigned.

Hamilton West-Ancaster-Dundas NDP candidate and public school trustee Alex Johnstone didn't resign in spite of the publication of a penis joke she made seven years ago on Facebook about an electric fence poll at Auschwitz.

If nothing else, social media has also revealed that a quick joke or satirical comment can get lost in translation in many different ways by the public.

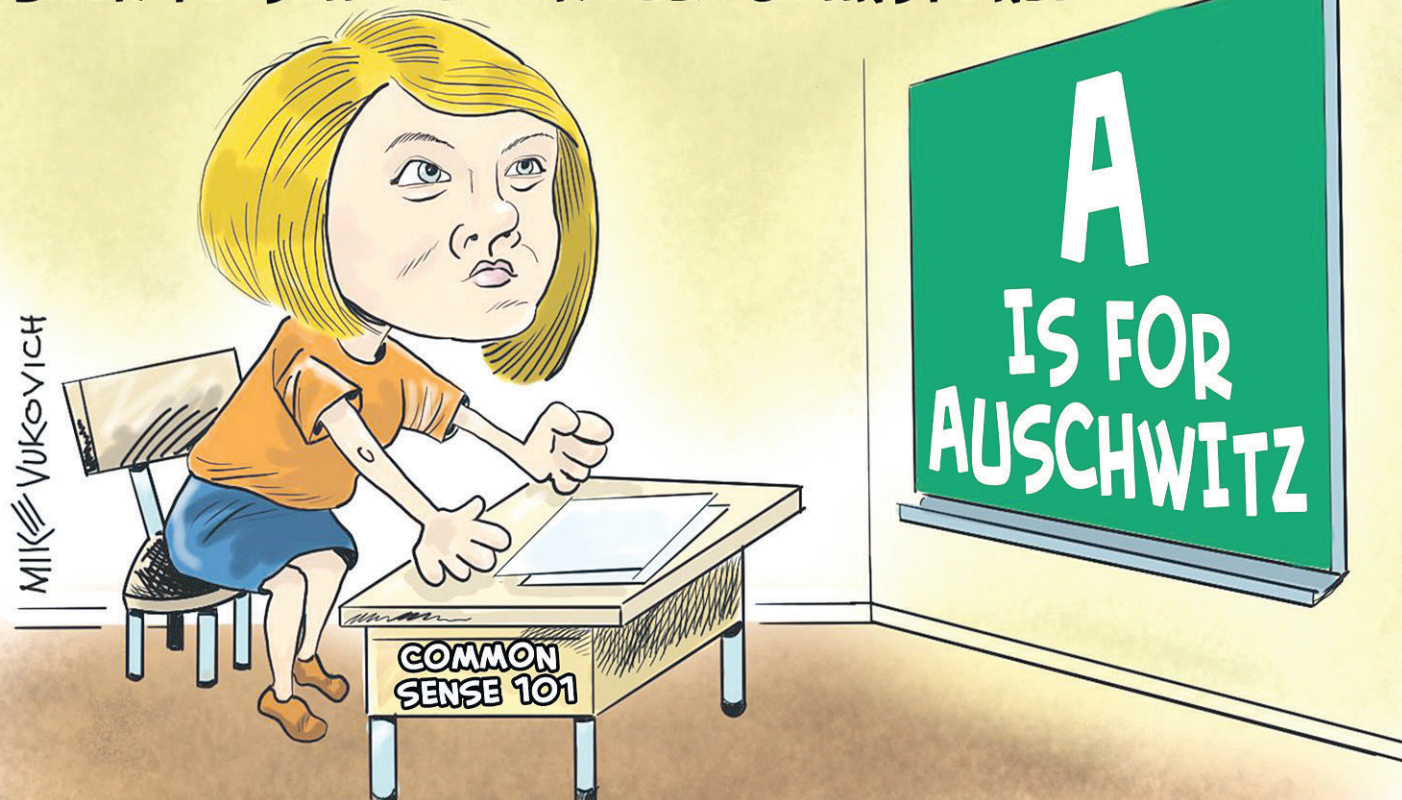
But the more troubling aspect to Johnstone's imbroglio is how she and her campaign have handled the fallout. Johnstone blundered by saying she has no knowledge of one of the most infamous concentration camps during the Second World War. That admission to a has prompted a national discussion about education, and what it takes to represent voters.

Subsequent to her admission, the Johnstone campaign has engaged in the worst public relations response a politician or any high profile person should take: the proverbial no comment. Instead, she has issued statements through Facebook, aligning herself with B'nai Brith, and committing to fight against racism and anti-Semitism. All well and good, but to ignore, run and deflect questions from the media raises doubts about a candidate's competence under pressure, ability to withstand stress and acceptance of making a mistake and taking responsibility.

If a candidate can't present themselves as human to voters, with the ability to be both positive and negative, why should they be trusted enough to be elected?

In last week's editorial the number of carding incidents since 2010 was reported incorrectly. The number is 9,005.

BACK TO SCHOOL FOR ALEX JOHNSTONE!



Column

Candidates' actions aren't on their party

Gordon Cameron

GROUP MANAGING EDITOR



If you've been following the federal election campaign at all you've no doubt noticed that unlike any election before, the social media history of candidates is coming back to bite them.

It would be easy to write a column either chiding would-be politicians for saying stupid things in the public sphere, or to say that what had been said/done in the past isn't necessarily an indication of anyone's current thoughts, beliefs or actions. However, I'm sure that would be as boring for you to read as it would be for me to write.

But what interests me is how people have been reacting to those incidents. I'd say it was funny if it weren't for the fact that it disturbs me so deeply. Friends, acquaintances, people I overhear on the streets — rational, intelligent people — seem to be willing to forgive their preferred candidate any past indiscre-

tion, while simultaneously giving no quarter to any candidate who isn't.

I disdain the seeming glee with which they announce in smug and gloating Facebook posts that candidate X's actions prove what they've been saying all along that party Y shouldn't be allowed to run the country. Then, when the shoe is on the other foot, I admit that I will enjoy a smirk at the spectacle of watching them tie themselves in knots to justify defending their guy or gal.

Sure, they'll have their reasons as to why their candidate's case is different, and there will be a sort of logic to it, but it doesn't take much rhetorical skill to wipe away the shiny veneer and see the turd underneath.

It's hypocrisy at its worst, but I don't believe it's conscious for most of them. Politics has become less and less about ideas, vision and the future and more about us-versus-them and there are few more innate human impulses than to protect the righteous "us" against the dastardly "them."

But by tribalizing our politics to the point where any gaffe, from minor to major, must be fought over with the vigour of a do-or-die military engagement, we make it a lot hard-

er for the average voter to see through the smoke on the battlefield and see what's truly important to them. Like an actual war, most people want no part of it.

However, pulling ourselves back from the brink requires every politically engaged person to take a good, hard look at their own actions and ask if they've been contributing to the problem or the solution?

Being part of the solution doesn't mean having to like the other parties any better, only accepting that politicians and candidates of all stripes are human and, like the rest of us, have said and done stupid things in our past.

Yes, as individuals they need to answer for their past words and deeds, but, with few exceptions (party leaders), those past actions have no more bearing on their party's competency than some of the boneheaded things I did when I was younger have on the quality of this newspaper.

Fortunately for me, we didn't have social media back then.

— Gordon Cameron is Group Managing Editor for Hamilton Community News.

Should Alex Johnstone resign as a candidate in the federal election?

Vote online at www.hamiltonnews.com

Last week we asked:

Should carding be banned?

64% said Yes and 36% said No

Have your say

EDITORIAL

The next big thing

Hamilton's business and political elite have always latched onto the "one big project" idea that will resurrect the economy and boost the city's reputation.

In the 1980s it was to build Copps Coliseum to attract an NHL team. The arena was constructed, but the NHL team never materialized, leaving Hamilton with a near worthless and aging white elephant on Bay Street and York Boulevard.

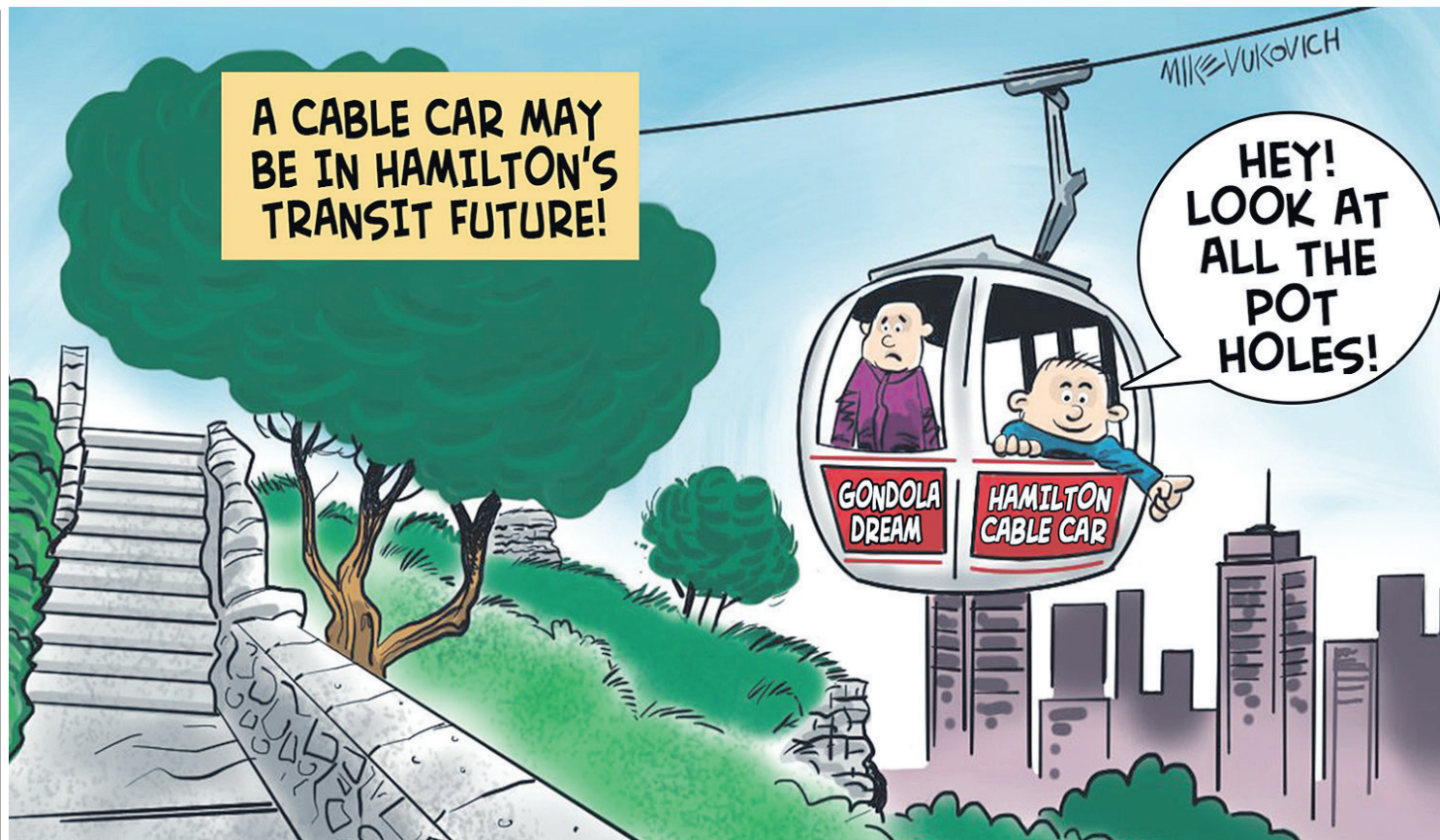
Next was a new football stadium. Hamilton did get Tim Hortons Field and the glory of the Pan Am Games, but the economic impact was fleeting.

Now the economic thinkers are saying the \$1-billion light rail transit system is the big project for rejuvenation. City politicians have been up front about the project, saying it is for "up lifting" the downtown core's stagnant economy.

Maybe Hamilton can still transform itself despite the LRT project. The city has consistently been identified by the Conference Board of Canada as the country's most economically diverse city. Agricultural, health and education sectors are slowly replacing the steel and manufacturing engines, and the west harbour could be a transformative project. Actually, the most important business to locate in the downtown is Nations Fresh Foods, becoming the first grocery store to service what has been a limited market.

But can Hamilton continue to transform itself? McMaster University business professor Marvin Ryder says there are underlining economic problems in Hamilton. Yes, the city has a below average unemployment rate at 5.4 per cent, but that's a misleading number (because the labour participation rate is lumped in with Grimsby and Burlington). Yes, the city has had \$1-billion in building permits four out of the last five years, but that hasn't translated into needed tax revenue. Yes, the city has seen economic activity, but private investment remains woefully inadequate. Ryder says seven out of the top 10 employers are from the public sector. And yes, the city's tax increases have been low over the years, but Hamilton's residential tax ratio remains a burden to homeowners who are footing about 70 per cent of the bill compared to the industrial, commercial and institutional sectors that pay 30 per cent.

It's appropriate to applaud some of Hamilton's economic strategy successes, but to say it is in recovery is missing the point. It is still too soon to gauge the success, and the reliance on the one big project to boost the city's image clouds its economic vision.



Column

When to jump in and when to stay silent

Gordon Cameron

GROUP MANAGING EDITOR



Last week, while I was scrolling through my social media, I came across a post that left me saddened and somewhat dismayed. A friend of mine had posted a link to a story espousing a conspiracy theory that science debunked many times over.

However, rather than launching into a passionate defence of the facts, I just sat there and sighed at the screen.

Don't get me wrong, I'm not one to back down from a good social media debate, nor am I generally shy in correcting people's ignorance, but in this case it seemed somehow inappropriate — due in large part to the fact that our relationship was never built on such discussions.

I decided that I valued this person's friendship more than I was concerned about the damaging potential of the falsehoods that were being spread.

But I sure didn't feel good about it.

Having been on social media since the early days, I've seen it evolve in directions that, looking back, seem almost antithetical to the medium's initial purpose.

When I first joined Facebook almost all of the postings were about what my friends were doing and what was going on in their lives. It was a way to stay connected no matter how much physical distance there was between us.

Looking through my feed now, it's inundated with re-posts of articles, humorous photos and videos, and political propaganda. Sure, the truly personal stuff is still there, but you have to wade through a lot of junk before you find it.

Before you start sighing into your newspaper, let me assure you that I am not saying that we should crack down on any form of legal expression on social media. If you want to share cat videos or why this politician is evil and this one is the second coming, fill your boots. How hypocritical would it be of me to blather on every week in print about whatever strikes me as interesting while denying others the same opportunity online?

But this sort of social media posting can often give us more information about our friends and acquaintances than we really want to know. I would have been quite happy never knowing that my friend blamed the media for covering up the "truth" about this particular issue. In fact, I would have preferred it.

I know, it's selfish. I also know there have likely been times when friends may have been disappointed by some of the things that I've posted, causes that I haven't liked or groups that I've not joined. I don't know if I've lost any friends over it, but I'm sure some people no longer think of me the same way they once did.

It's human nature to believe that what we believe is what's right and true, and that the people we like and respect believe it too. When we discover it's not true, it can cause us distress, if only for a moment.

It also forces us to realize that not all friends are created equal. In this case, I guess I'm happy enough to enjoy what we have rather than trying to forge something deeper.

— Gordon Cameron is Group Managing Editor for Hamilton Community News.

Have your say

Are you optimistic about Hamilton's economic future?

Vote online at www.hamiltonnews.com

Last week we asked:

Should new ward boundaries ignore the borders of pre-amalgamation communities?

62% said Yes and 38% said No

EDITORIAL

Calling for 311

Hamilton officials are usually the first to crow about being the first municipality to do something ahead of other cities.

Yet 12 years ago, Hamilton refused to provide what is now almost a common service to its citizens.

In 2004 Ward 4 councillor Sam Merulla introduced a motion requesting staff to investigate the possibility of creating a 311 system for the city. The system, which has become a simplified access to non-emergency, local government service for residents, has become a popular feature since it was introduced in the United States in the 1980s.

City staff eventually told council the system was too expensive to implement. And besides, the city had its call centre operating despite a number of glitches.

Flash-forward to 2016 and city manager Chris Murray is explaining to councillors the goals of the city's revamped 2016-2025 strategic plan. At the end of the presentation, he had a CBC news report of how Boston was doing wonders with new cell phone technology and data analytics by using the 311 system.

The presentation revealed how far behind Hamilton is in providing proper communications and data informational services to its residents.

There are about 300 United States cities that use the service, while in Canada, most large municipalities such as Halton and Durham regions, Montreal, Calgary, Vancouver, Toronto have long ago establish 311 service. Edmonton began operating the system in 2008 and fielded 5,000 a day in 2009. The Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission approved in 2004 the 311 service for municipalities to use.

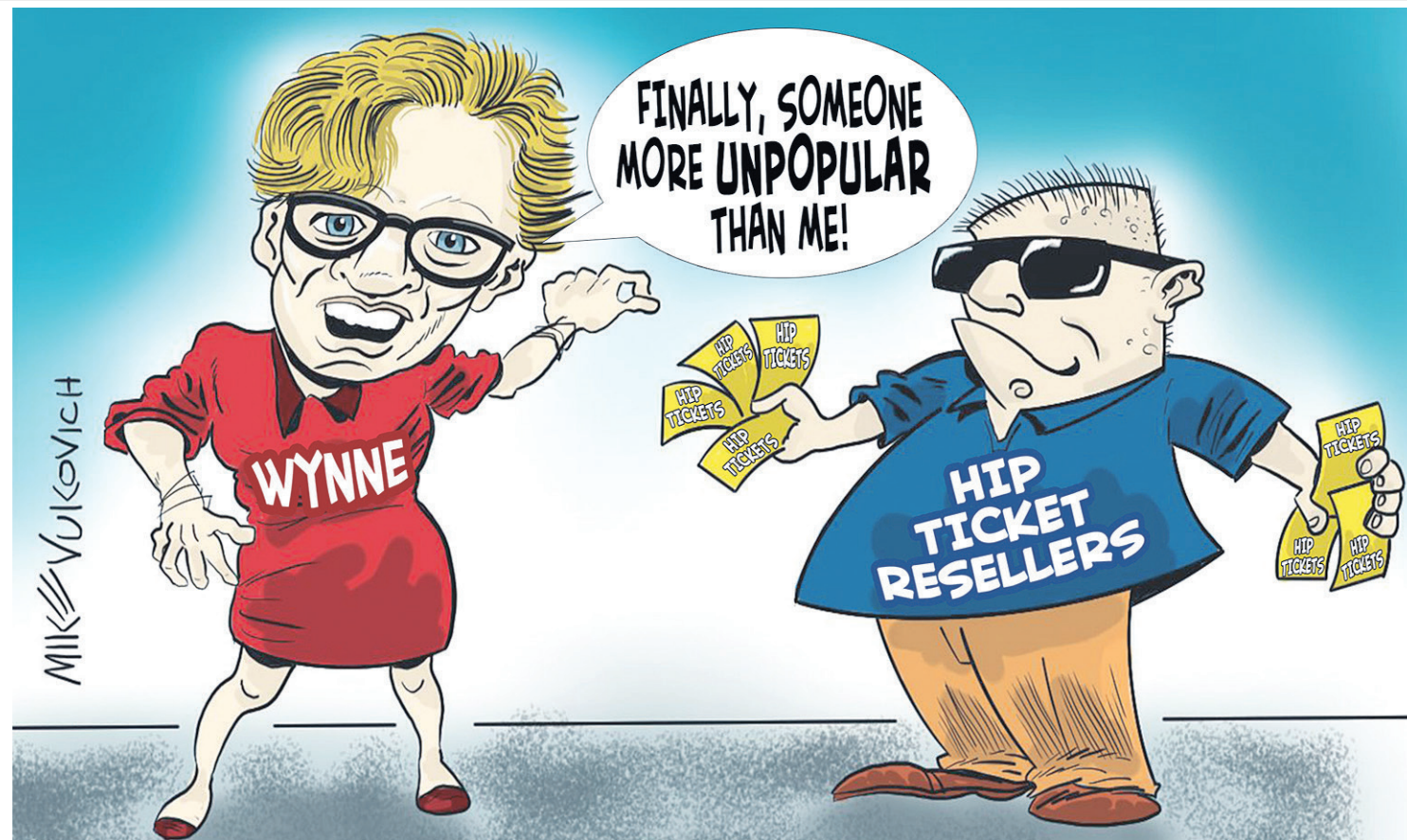
As technology has improved, municipalities are using the 311 service for more than just a one-way telephone call. In this data-driven era, municipalities use the information residents provide to track city employees work response, measure performances, while allowing staff and councillors to make strategic decisions.

To be sure the cost of the service — most notably the software — can be expensive. Some cities have been able to limit their spending to about \$3 million, but typically for larger cities the cost can be \$10 million or more.

Hamilton, though, as city staff and politicians have been repeating to themselves, is an innovative city that seeks to find value in the money that is being spent on residents.

So it would seem that implementing a 311 system would represent a cost-effective service that would eventually save money for taxpayers, while also keeping an eye on employees.

And isn't that what Hamilton residents and staff want while avoiding another asphalt fiasco?



Column

The Hip's end, isn't the end of the music

Gordon Cameron

GROUP MANAGING EDITOR



When I heard that Kurt Cobain died, I felt nothing. I was in high school at the time, but Nirvana's music never spoke to me. I wasn't a disaffected young man and quite frankly never understood the appeal.

Fast forward a couple of decades and the news that The Tragically Hip's Gord Downie was dying of cancer had me in shock. Unlike grunge rock The Hip's music resonated deep inside me. The songs were about things that seemed familiar, even if they weren't. They were stories, Canadian stories, that stood apart from the generic American myths that permeated the airwaves. Listening to The Hip made me feel special as a Canadian and superior to the Americans who never seemed to get the appeal.

In the end that's just fine with me. Who knows how their music would have changed had they made it big in the States.

So many of their songs are masterpieces. Lyrically they are dense, full to the brim of images, allusions and pathos without being overwrought or artless. Musically, they could rock out with the best of them and then deliver a tune so achingly subtle that it left you mesmerized.

And then there's the uniqueness of Downie's voice. His bleating vibrato always seemed to me to be a more earnest and less campy version of the B-52s Fred Schneider. However, Downie's vocal stylings married perfectly with the music giving The Hip their signature sound.

I'm amazed at how many of their songs connect to moments in my past, either directly or by perfectly capturing the emotions of the moment. "Fireworks" reminds me of my first adult relationship and "Bobcageon" reminds me of when it ended. "Little Bones" is about blaring the album *Road Apples* and singing along as we got lost on our way to Scout camp. "Wheat Kings" is sitting around a camp fire on a summer's night listening to a guy and guitar.

The Hip were my first big concert. My best friends and I piled into a minivan and made the trip to the Markham Fairgrounds for

1995's *Another Roadside Attraction* festival. While the show was fantastic, the day was somewhat bittersweet. It was that summer where I was transitioning from high school to university and this turned out to be one of the last times we were all together for many years to come.

I saw the band again at a New Year's Eve show at Copps perhaps most notable for the fact that a drunk guy sitting behind us decided to vomit all over my brother (well, mostly his seat).

It's hard to say goodbye to something you love, but while The Hip's frontman may die, the band's music will not.

And that's the great power of music. As long as it continues to connect to the listeners, be they long-time aficionados or those getting their first taste, it's as vital and potent as it was when it was first written or recorded.

That's why even though I didn't share the grief of my classmates over Cobain's death, I understood it.

Just as I'm sure that they'd understand my feelings over Downie's pending passing.

— Gordon Cameron is Group Managing Editor for Hamilton Community News.

Have your say

Should Hamilton implement a 311 system?
Vote online at www.hamiltonnews.com

Last week we asked:

Should Hamilton's schools all play in the same league?

68% said Yes and 32% said No