

ACTION REQUIRED

It shouldn't be that surprising that Prime Minister Justin Trudeau used blackface and brownface about 20 years ago during what seems to be a particularly care-free environment populated by predominately white people.

There seems to be a particular obsession among a certain young white male demographic that enjoyed putting on blackface, whether indifferent or not to the disturbing history blackface has had on black people's culture and race.

In only a few years politicians from Virginia - Gov. Ralph Northam, who continues to serve - to Florida, Louisiana, South Carolina and Nova Scotia have been caught on video or in photographs from past events cavorting around in blackface in an apparent attempt to amuse their friends.

Trudeau is only the latest - albeit highest profile - politician and well-off person to be caught cavalierly welding a racist image.

One of his explanations is that he didn't know at the time blackface was racist, a typically ignorant contriteness and casual indifference to the hurt that the spectacle has caused.

While the apology would seem to be hard to believe, it is understandable coming from a person, even a party, that has failed to live up to the promises made to Canada's Indigenous people, as well as other individuals of colour that have contributed to our diverse country.

While the Liberals and Trudeau's programs, promises and moral authority that were promoted in 2015 were rooted in an attempt to "do politics differently" they have wholeheartedly failed to meet even the basic test of decency for the people who actually believed in their rhetoric.

Trudeau's blackface photos and video have a particular resonance in Hamilton where politicians, police and the community itself are failing to adequately address the hatred that has emerged from certain corners of the city.

While racists and white supremacists are emboldened to spew their vile hate-filled statements, community leaders and national politicians are failing to stand up to these hate-filled groups, allowing them to grow and proliferate.

While Canadian society seems to be unravelling before our eyes into various tribal groupings, exploited by cold calculating number-crunching politicians in an effort to remain in power, Trudeau's blackface images would seem to be thin gruel to complain about. They are offensive, no doubt. It is a reminder that Trudeau's character is sketchy at best until he matures into a person that deserves respect.

But of more importance is what the images reveal and the subsequent discussion among Canadians.

The images show that racism is alive and well in Canadian society despite what politicians and other leaders would have us believe: that everything is just OK.

If nothing else Trudeau's racist images have revealed that all Canadians have a long way to go to address the hurt and denigration that racism has fostered.

Apologies are just not good enough anymore. Action is demanded.

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LIMITS TO FREE SPEECH

COLUMNIST SHANE PENNELLS WRITES THAT IT'S BETTER TO ERR TOWARD LETTING PEOPLE SPEAK



SHANE PENNELLS
Column

Should there be limits to freedom of speech? It's a long-waged debate that has caught fire again thanks to several key social issues, including a resurgence of white nationalism. If someone's speech is deemed hateful, should it be given a platform like a newspaper column? Does denying it publication strengthen or weaken public discourse on that topic?

I've been a part of many internal media debates on this topic, both as someone working behind the news scenes and as a media adviser. Despite many heated discussions, my media colleagues and I have never come to an agreement on where free speech begins and ends. Nor should we.

Journalism is the only

Constitutionally protected profession, and for good reason. Journalism is in the business of reporting the facts, not deciding what they mean. While the reporting of an event should only be fact-based, the social interpretation of the event is wholly political, which is best left to the public's varying viewpoints.

However, in an increasingly partisan social atmosphere the media is left having to often defend to whom they give exposure and why. There's a perception that publication of something means that the outlet agrees with what is being said. That might be correct for some outlets who serve a specific special interest base, but that's not the case for most media outlets.

One of the things that my media brethren do usually agree on is that limiting media access can be an

unintended slippery slope to censorship. The question isn't where do you start limiting access; it's once you do, where do you stop? The concern is that if you say to someone "no you can't speak," you'll be expected to do it again on another hot button topic.

The underlying theory is that it's best to err on the side of letting someone speak, knowing someone else can use their freedom of speech to publicly disagree. The hope is that contentious speech will give rise to insightful public discussion and new ideas.

I doubt there will ever be a time when everyone is happy with the media and their handling of the pressing social issues of the day. It's probably for the best.

When introducing a radio adaption of his novel *Brave New World*, Aldous Huxley said, "The price of liberty, and even of common humanity, is eternal vigilance."

In the best interests of public discourse, let the free speech debate ever rage onward.

Shane Pennells is a filmmaker and writer who works with at-risk youth.

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PROVINCE LEAVES CITIES WITH CANNABIS QUESTIONS

Just as the Progressive Conservative government seemingly has been making up policies on the back of envelopes when it comes to health care, energy, transportation and finance, it comes as no surprise it is yet again changing the rules when it comes to legalizing pot sales.

First, it was eliminating the previous Liberal government's idea of creating a standalone entity called the Ontario Cannabis Store - modelled on the LCBO - to sell pot.

Then it introduced the idea of allowing private retailers to establish stores, including the decision to reduce the buffer of 500 metres to 150 metres for potential stores near schools and daycares.

Now as communities are in the midst of deciding whether to allow private pot stores within their boundaries, the Ford government in an announcement at the proverbial last minute is limiting the private retailers to 25, with six identified within the Greater Toronto Area, to be selected by a lottery in January.

A few municipalities have already opted out of allowing private cannabis stores within their borders, including Mississauga and Markham, while Toronto and Ottawa have decided they will become host cities. Municipalities have until Jan. 22 to decide whether to opt out of the program.

Hamilton had been scheduled to debate the idea at its Dec. 18 general issues committee meeting.

On the surface it would seem to be an obvious decision to allow private cannabis retail stores to sell legal marijuana in the city. For the last few years Hamilton has been battling with limited effect to close the nearly 80 illegal pot dispensaries across the city. Mayor Fred Eisenberger has stated Hamilton should take the lead and allow private stores.

But what kind of deal will Hamilton receive from a province that has a questionable history of fulfilling its obligations?

According to staff, the city is projected to receive nearly \$574,500 from the province to address costs associated with cannabis legalization. However, if Hamilton agrees to be a host city, it would receive additional funding. The province has also indicated if Ontario's share of the federal excise tax over the next two years exceeds \$100 million, the province will provide 50 per cent of the surplus to municipalities.

Municipalities will be incurring enforcement costs to make sure these shops follow the rules. And the police and health departments will have to address the corresponding social problems that are expected to come from selling pot.

The reality, though, is these are changing social times.

Alcohol and pharmaceuticals are relatively accessible to the public with proper controls in place.

Cannabis is now a legal, recreational item, that is grown and harvested and is projected to boost the local economy.

With the proper controls in place, private cannabis stores should have the same accommodation and be accessible to all adults.

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CHRISTMAS WITHOUT MUSIC?

COLUMNIST BARRY COE DOESN'T THINK SO



BARRY COE
Column

I was picking up a few items at Canadian Tire when an employee commented to me that he had enough of in-store Christmas music: "It shouldn't start until Dec. 14 and end Dec. 25."

Even though I'm known as "Merry Barry" by old radio colleagues, I could understand. But Christmas without music? Never. I recall singing Christmas tunes at CHWO, Oakville, one December day and a consultant remarked that my singing in the hallway was unprofessional. I couldn't decide if he was commenting on my demeanour or my impression of Dean Martin singing "It's a Marshmallow World."

The singing of carols and celebration of Christmas

was frowned upon by Oliver Cromwell's England and indeed was banned by Puritans in Massachusetts in 1659.

The Christmas music we deem as traditional largely began in the 1940s and thrived into the '50s. "Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas," "White Christmas" and "Silver Bells" were a side-product of the postwar baby boom.

I can't imagine Christmas without music, in spite of the incessant airing of tunes in stores and all-day Christmas music on some radio stations. Christmas music has evolved over the years with some communities and schools banning religious carols and recently "Baby It's Cold Outside." The CBC back tracked last week on its decision to drop the song from its playlist as listener pressure as 72 per cent of Canadians polled favour playing the Christmas classic.

I still enjoy going to Westmount Secondary for their Winter Concert regardless of the title change, not allowed to call it a Christmas Concert. Hear-

ing young people sing and the band playing Sleigh Ride take me back to the golden era of Christmas music.

My final Children's Fund ambassador function was attending Christ Church Cathedral's Hamilton Children's Choir concert. The children dwell in the core of Hamilton and music is an opportunity to share the Hope and Joy music brings. It enables marginalized children and their parents to experience inclusion and the broad educational options music can provide.

Witnessing the magic of Christmas music through the voices of children is perhaps my greatest Christmas gift. The true joy of seeing anticipation in children's eyes while singing "Silent Night" has never diminished.

So this year, continue to cherish the music of Christmas as it is truly a rather precious gift before the onslaught of a dark and dreary winter to come.

Where did I put those lyrics to "Marshmallow World?"

Barry Coe is a media and PR consultant, and a member of the CHML Children's Fund Board.



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SAVING THE NPCA FROM ITSELF

There had been a sense that after the recent municipal election the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority's problems would finally reach a conclusion and get back to overseeing the vast expanse of land under its stewardship.

But just as with everything else this organization and board membership has done over the last few years, nothing is ever easy.

It's obvious that the public and politicians are fed up with the antics of the board. After the October municipal election 12 out of 15 board members - who are regional politicians appointed by regional politicians as Niagara's representatives - were defeated. But even though the new term of municipal council begins Dec. 1, some of those defeated councillors still want to continue to be on the authority's board until a new slate of representatives are appointed by the surrounding municipalities, including Hamilton. Not only are some of the board members insisting on staying around, but a few even want to be involved in selecting their replacements.

At least one municipality, St. Catharines, has urged the Niagara Region to appoint an interim board to oversee the authority until the new board is installed.

This is only the latest mess that the authority has embroiled itself in. As the Ontario auditor general's report made clear, it is an organization that has significant issues across several areas involving human resources, conflicts of interests, excessive costs, skyrocketing legal bills, tendering and leadership problems.

The authority is also well-known to pick fights with partners, including the City of Hamilton. The pair are locked in a legal challenge initiated by Hamilton when the authority doubled its rate apportionment three years ago. Rather than reaching out to a faithful stakeholder to resolve the issue, the authority instead used a cudgel to bludgeon its opponent.

Hamilton's appeal of the provincial decision reached in January 2018 that forced the city to pay the higher levy has potentially significant ramifications to the authority. If Hamilton loses, it will demand greater representation on the board, something that Niagara regional politicians are fearful of seeing happen. Even before the court decision, Hamilton could have additional representation around the table as authority staff recently discovered a long-forgotten 1994 order-in-council decision that may or may not establish how the authority appoints representatives. That discussion could prompt a change in the composition of the authority to benefit Hamilton.

Regardless of the political maneuverings that is currently absorbing the conservation authority, it is clear based upon the auditor general's report and from current board members' misplaced political machinations that its board needs to be cleaned up. It is a dysfunctional organization dominated by cronyism and personal empire builders. It is time to blow it up and start to rebuild the trust with the stakeholders it represents and the public it serves.



LOVING THE TREE OF HOPE

COLUMNIST BARRY COE REFLECTS ON A CHERISHED TRADITION



BARRY COE
Column

One of my first promotional jobs when I arrived at CHML in 1986 was the Christmas Tree of Hope campaign.

It was conceived in 1976 by the station's general manager Don Luzzi to raise funds for the marginalized children of greater Hamilton.

My prime task was to ensure that all the light bulbs on the tall pine tree at the corner of King and James worked. A CIBC maintenance man, John, helped me check each and every bulb. When the power switch was eventually thrown, thousands of tiny lights glowed.

Hundreds of people ap-

plauded, and the brass band of the Salvation Army heralded the arrival of the Christmas season. My affinity for the Christmas Tree of Hope was born. I have attended every Tree of Hope lighting since that momentous year.

When I retired from Mission Services four years ago, I was honoured to become a volunteer board member of the CHML Children's Fund. I took great delight in helping allocate thousands of dollars to over 45 worthy charities in our city. Every Christmas, we helped to provide hope to a growing number of families in crisis.

However, this year, my heart told me that time to pass the torch to a new generation has arrived.

As the late Doug Wallace, former Amity CEO, advised me: "You must know when your time to step aside has come. Everyone has a best-before date or shelf life."

I knew that my contacts were of the past and that

someone younger and better connected to evolving social needs was required to keep the relevancy of the board I loved. It is one of the most difficult decisions I have ever made.

I will miss the compassion of my board colleagues who donate time and talent to the fund and the leadership of Jeff Storey and Olivia Mackay.

The love and joy I shared with the board will last me a lifetime.

I hope you will join me as the lights go on again in Gore Park, Dec. 7 at 6 p.m.

Hopefully there'll be no dead bulbs.

Thank you to everyone who allowed me to share in the most meaningful component of Christmas - providing hope and unconditional love to those in need.

Merry Christmas and God bless. It's been a privilege.

Barry Coe is a media and PR consultant, and a member of the CHML Children's Fund Board

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