

COMMENT

Anything's possible.

FORMER ROB FORD POLICY ADVISOR BRIAN JOHNSTON, AFTER BEING ASKED IF HE THOUGHT THE EMBATTLED TORONTO MAYOR COULD WEATHER THE CONTINUING CRACK-TAPE SCANDAL, JOHNSTON AND FORD'S EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT LEFT THEIR JOBS YESTERDAY.

Toronto council MIA on Ford video

If crack scandal broke in Hamilton, the hammer would fall promptly



ANDREW DRESCHEL

The Hamilton Spectator

One of the fascinating sideshows to the Rob Ford train wreck is how ineffectual Toronto city councillors have been in the face of it.

It's two weeks since reports of a cellphone video apparently showing the Toronto mayor smoking crack cocaine first surfaced.

Since then, the scandal has grown by leaps and bounds and yet Toronto councillors — all 44 of them — seem incapable of taking any official steps to get to the bottom of the bizarre story.

If this was happening in Hamilton, the hammer would have fallen long ago.

Hamilton councillors would have immediately tossed the issue into the lap of the integrity commissioner, even if it meant calling a special meeting of council to ratify the motion.

Look at the prompt action they took against Mayor Bob Bratina over allegations he bullied city manager Chris Murray.

You can imagine how screamin' fast they'd move if one of their own appeared to be smoking crack — in the company of a man who was later killed — amid reports that drug dealers were trying to sell a video of it.

That hasn't happened in Toronto, even though it was the first Canadian city to create the office of an integrity commissioner to ensure council members privately and publicly abide by a code of ethical conduct and uphold the laws of the land.

True, as in Hamilton's case, the only penalties Toronto integrity commissioner Janet Leiper has at her disposal are a reprimand and a 90-day suspension of pay.

But that's not the point. As in the case of Hamilton's ethics watchdog, Leiper has the legal authority to exercise the power of a commission under the Public Inquiries Act.

That means she can serve summons requiring people to attend a public inquiry, testify under oath, and produce any information, document or "thing" under a person's power or control. You don't need a hound dog to sniff out the relevance of that for the crack video controversy.

Ford, of course, denies the video exists, that he uses crack, or that he's an addict.

Mind you, it's entirely possible a member of the Toronto public has asked Leiper to investigate. If so, Leiper's not at liberty to say.

"I only report publicly once I've made findings. All the other work in my office is done under a confidential umbrella."

She says the only way the public would know a complaint has been filed is if the complainant went to the media or if a Toronto councillor or council as a body asked her to conduct an inquiry under the Municipal Act.

Leiper declines to say whether the latter has taken place, but it's clear it hasn't. "There hasn't been a council meeting since all of this started, so you can

Apparently, no councillor saw fit or had the wit to raise the possibility of an integrity investigation.



NATHAN DENETTE, THE CANADIAN PRESS

Mayor Rob Ford says he doesn't smoke crack.

draw your own conclusions," she says.

That's not entirely accurate. The Toronto Star first published the story Friday, May 17, before the long weekend. Council met to discuss a new casino on Tuesday, May 21. The crack video was all over the news and on everyone's mind during that meeting. But apparently, no councillor saw fit or had the wit to raise the possibility of an integrity investigation.

Their next council meeting is June 11. Perhaps by then they'll realize they can do more than fruitlessly urge Ford to answer questions about the video.

Perhaps councillors are passively waiting for police to conclude their investigation into the killing of Anthony Smith, the man linked to the alleged crack video, and allegations stemming from Mark Towhey, Ford's fired chief of staff.

If so, they should remind themselves that their code of conduct requires them to perform their duties in a manner that promotes public confidence and bears close scrutiny. That hasn't happened. So far, they've looked like little more than discombobulated bystanders at a bad train derailment.

Andrew Dreschel's commentary appears Monday, Wednesday and Friday. adreschel@thespec.com 905-526-3495

SPEC BRIEFLY

Short and excerpted comments sent to letters@thespec.com

Unanswered LRT questions are many

With all the discussion about the pros and cons of LRT, I have not heard where the LRT trains will be stored when not in use. I also have not heard what contingency plan would be in place if one broke down and what plan is in place in case of an incident which halts traffic. At present, cars and buses can be re-routed, with some delays, if for example there is a fire that causes a road to be blocked.

How will Metrolinx, city council and LRT supporters address these situations. No one has disclosed where the service yard for the LRT will be or the power supply for the system. The city scrapped the trolleys, because the overhead wires were an eyesore, in favour of propane and diesel buses. And what about handi-capped accessibility? **RICHARD APPLEYARD, HAMILTON**

Lawyers in a feeding frenzy

I read Susan Clairmont's description of an apparent dispute between two lawyers over representing Dellen Millard. For some reason, the recent developments bring to mind stories of sailing ships in the old days. Crews would regularly throw their trash overboard, and watch as hungry sharks battled over the garbage in vicious feeding frenzies, often attacking each other in the process. Just saying. **JACK CORUZZI, BRANTFORD**

All-day GO more important than LRT

I hate to say I told you so, but I told you so. Several months ago, I voiced my opinion that the next big boondoggle would be the LRT and lo and behold, it has come to fruition! Hamilton cannot afford the LRT and the revenue raisers that Metrolinx has suggested will really only benefit the GTA, not the GTHA. I hate to admit that I agree with Mayor Bob Bratina, but I do — all-day GO is more important to Hamilton than the LRT will ever be. Let's opt out and save the taxpayers of Hamilton from way more than \$477. **JACKIE OKE, ANCASTER**

A place called 'Baby Cottage'

Some of Uganda's orphans get a loving start. But where do they go from there?

THOMAS FROESE

JINJA, UGANDA It's Monday and we're on the road early, dressed up, driving the 90 minutes down a dangerous road, the road that we won't drive at night anymore because we fear it may kill us.

We arrive at the court in Jinja, a relaxed beach town on Lake Victoria, to finally be told "Yes. Yes, everything is in order and the court is satisfied, and Hannah will never have any family outside of yours, the family she clearly belongs in."

Hannah is the Ugandan girl who has been in our home for almost four years now. We just need the final stamp of court approval to make her adoption official.

But this is Africa and life moves slowly and public services are poor — and after the court lost our file for some months, then later found it — and today, the judge, despite our scheduled appearance, is absent. This lone judge of the high court serves a district of hundreds of thousands and is pulled elsewhere, so we're rescheduled for five months down the road.

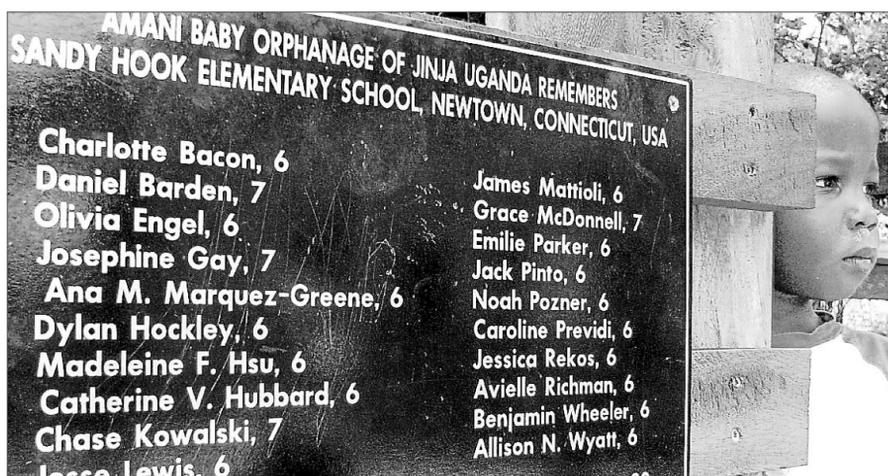
It's the one thing that we wanted cleared before we all return to Canada for the summer. But it's a worthwhile day, regardless, because Hannah and Jon, they're seven, and especially big sister, Liz, aged nine, have been planning it all for a while — our visit to the Jinja orphanage that was once Hannah's home.

We arrive and lug bags of sugar and rice and things too heavy for the kids, and clothes, and the children have the velvety red box with Ugandan cash. They've raised 200,000 Ugandan shillings, about \$78 Cdn, from their allowances and the jewellery they've made and sold and the appeals to friends and schoolmates and neighbours and whoever else would listen.

Besides Hannah, more than 300 children have come through this place, Amani Baby Cottage, in its nine years: children abandoned at maternity wards and roadsides and swamps and pit latrines, children whose parents have died from childbirth or AIDS or things unknown, really, or whose parents simply can't feed another hungry mouth.

Most of the 300 have been reunited with extended family of one sort or another, while those without anyone have been adopted, both locally in Uganda and internationally. Founding director Danyne Randolph Bharj, a Texan with a heart as big as that state, is happy to see us again.

We tour past stainless steel tubs and manual laundry washers — they look like large toilet



PHOTOS BY THOMAS FROESE, SPECIAL TO THE HAMILTON SPECTATOR

A Ugandan orphan, Godfrey, 2, at his orphanage home in Jinja, Uganda, with a commemorative plaque. The playground was built by volunteers from Sandy Hook, CT, where 20 children died in a school shooting in December 2012. Right, youngsters sleep at the Amani Baby Cottage orphanage. It's estimated there are as many as two million orphans in the East African country.



plungers — that come from Mennonite circles in the U.S. where electricity is not a concern. We see new construction. A circle of children sit enjoying a nursery class. It's all clean and professional and more than any publicly funded school for older kids would even have.

While my son chases the chickens and my wife and daughters tour more, I walk over to little Godfrey, one of 59 kids now at Amani.

He's enjoying the elaborate playground recently built by volunteers from Sandy Hook, the community in Connecticut where 20 children were shot dead just days before last Christmas.

It's all good, like water to the thirsty. It's unknown exactly how many orphans Uganda has — estimates are as high as two million — and like oth-

Like others across Africa, these children are receiving good things, even small things, which, really, is the only way to change the world.

ers across Africa, these children are receiving good things, even small things, which, really, is the only way to change the world. Danyne comes and picks up Godfrey, laughs and holds him close.

But it's Monday and there's more. In my shoulder bag is today's newspaper spilling ink on what is being coined Black Monday, a growing citizens' campaign against the theft of public funds. Public money in a place like Uganda has always been stolen, but now it's disappearing without consequence or shame.

It's why this corner of Africa has roads that are deadly and courts that are hopeless and public schools that are literally crumbling.

There's always outside help, like with, for example, Amani. But everyday Ugandans are finding it harder to live with the corruption and rot, and some are now protesting by wearing black from head to toe on Mondays.

It needs attention and I will surely share more another time.

Because after these beautiful children are rescued, what in the world happens to them?

Author and journalist Thomas Froese is a Hamiltonian who lives in Africa with his family most of the year. Follow him at www.thomasfroese.com and www.dailydad.net