

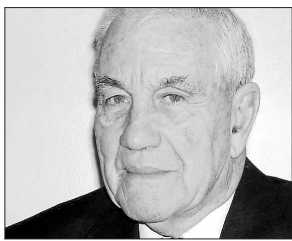
COMMENT

We'll be eternally grateful. This has brought peace upon us. And what a wonderful time of year for that to happen.

ASHLEY SMITH'S MOTHER, CORALEE, AFTER A CORONER'S JURY DECIDED SMITH DID NOT DIE BY SUICIDE BUT WAS A VICTIM OF HOMICIDE.

The wrong targets just got zapped

Government's handling of the power file has been a disaster



ANDY FRAME

The Ontario auditor general's report has highlighted high salaries and pension plans at Ontario Power Generation. The report has made big headlines and Energy Minister Bob Chiarelli told Jake Epp, OPG chairperson, that he wanted a strong response. A few hours after the report, three top OPG executives were fired.

The wrong people were fired.

It is clear that the response was to avert attention from the fact that the chairperson and members of the board of directors of OPG are responsible for appointing the president to set employment contracts and conditions.

Chiarelli and Premier Kathleen Wynne know the chair and the directors are government people who carry out the directions of the shareholder, the Ontario government. The board appoints a president who hires the executive and sets their salary. The board sets the pension benefits for OPG.

Lawyers know you fire people for cause, criminal acts or other serious actions damaging to a corporation. When does having a high salary become cause? The three executives were fired so there would be a strong response to the auditor general. They have become scapegoats, and have been wronged to make the government look good.

When the executives were terminated, Epp said their severance would be negotiated. They were fired without cause and are due a high severance payment, probably more than \$1 million each. This will be another part of your hydro bill.

This hydro cost story is just the latest in a series of decisions made by the 10-year-old Liberal government. The first was to shut down all Ontario coal plants and "go green." Coal was out; wind and solar power were in. The Green Energy Act was passed to make the government look green.

Twenty-year contracts were signed for windmill projects at high rates. They provide little energy. Many 20-year fixed-rate "take or pay" solar contracts were signed. Many solar energy generators could not be connected to the grid. Little energy is being delivered. A deal with Samsung cost \$250 million and few of the jobs promised have been delivered. Natural gas generating plants were promoted, and some cancelled. Cost: \$1 billion.

A major item in their plan was a special deal with Bruce Power to sell power to the system at a rate of twice of that paid to the OPG.

These actions are part of their electric power system political plan. The government makes all the decisions and forecasts higher rates. Customers have no influence. They must pay their hydro bill.

The cost of government decisions is delivered to the customer by way of the Ontario Power Authority that operates the Global Adjustment Fund. Remember Oakville and Mississauga power plants and the sites chosen by OPA as directed by the government? Much of the cost will be paid by the Global Adjustment Fund.

In June, a report showed that the cost of regular electrical generation and delivery in Ontario was 2.82 cents per kwh and 6.41 cents for the Global Adjustment Fund. Seventy per cent of the total cost for electricity (the Global Adjustment Fund) results from paying for contracts, windmill and solar systems and directions by the government — decisions made for their political power plan.

The hard evidence appears in a summary of energy costs across Canada. A headline: High power costs cost industry users in Ontario 123 per cent more than in Montreal.

The province has lost much of its industrial base. The cost of electrical energy is a big part of their costs. Automotive, steel, chemical and many other types of industry have shut down. Just this month, Heinz and Kellogg announced plant closings because of high costs: More jobs gone.

Residential customers suffer. The rate has increased more than 250 per cent in 10 years and the Chiarelli is promising even higher rates. Residential customers need electricity. They cook meals, wash clothes, watch TV, operate appliances. They use electricity and they pay their bills. The real cost is having to do without other things because they have lost the dollars spent on the doubling of the hydro bill. They don't have money for hockey equipment, for dance classes, or new clothes.

All of the high costs are a result of decisions made by the government that promised to reform the electricity system and look green.

The strong response to the firing of hydro executives is the wrong target. The problem comes from results of decisions made by the government in their electrical power policy. It has been a disaster.

Andy Frame is a consultant in the electrical power industry, a former adviser to electric utilities, the Ontario Ministry of Energy, a former municipal hydro chairperson and chair of the Utility Association.

The Basement That Stole Christmas

It was down and dirty — until a baby saved the day



PAUL BENEDETTI

Okay kids, gather round. It's time for Uncle Paul's Christmas story.

What's that? You'd rather play Xbox? You've got the new Grand Theft Auto 5? How old are you anyway? Uh, huh. Remind me to talk to your mother later.

Okay, settle in. Pass Uncle Paul his nice glass of Christmas cheer.

This is the story of The Basement That Stole Christmas.

Once upon a time, there came to a household a terrible scourge. What's that? A scourge? It's a bad thing. Something that causes great suffering — like your math class.

Anyway, this terrible blight came upon our family. What's a blight? Oh, never mind. There came three dark forces: One was a wet and mouldy thing called Leaky Basement. He was soggy and smelly and he brought floods and pestilence.

Beside him was an old and cracked creature who cried and cried and his tears formed a river through our family's basement. He was called Weeping Tile.

And with them came the most vile of the three. He was a dark and noxious force of great mystery. He was known as Seeping Sewage of Unknown Origin.

These three descended upon our family in the days before the Christmas Season. They came with great fury and a kind of swampy pong that filled the whole house and that no air freshener could challenge. They formed a team of destruction — The Forces of Short Term Financial Ruin.

Now, men of great learning knew that darkness and destruction could come at any time and they would prepare to do battle. No Billy, not with swords, but with a great shield, called the Emergency Fund. This is a chest filled with gold and silver equal to three months salary. No Billy, "salary"

The Invoice from Hell caused in our hero great wailing and gnashing of teeth, even with his dental appliance in place.



THOMAS FROESE

ENTEbbe, UGANDA It's the end of another year of words.

Words that have routinely informed us and words that have even sometimes, like summer snow, given a fresh look at everyday things. Like what happened recently in Africa during my children's nightly reading, a story both troubling and reassuring.

"You know," I said, after, "things will happen in your life. Bad things. And nobody will be able to save you from them. I won't be able to and neither will your mother. But let me tell you something. God loves to take these sorts of things and turn them into something good."

The kids listened and rolled over for another night of sleep. As the moment vanished like millions of others, I was left awed by parenthood and how it can cut you open like nothing else; how it's apparently meant to, how this too is nothing to fear.

Just before, I had hosted two visitors in my Ugandan home, one from Burlington, the other a woman formerly of Hamilton region, who grew up in troubled South Africa while it transitioned out of apartheid. Our conversation during breakfast had somehow fallen on the same topic — today's children.

"Canadian kids have their piano and hockey and, and, and," said the one.

What many don't have in our cowardly new world is the freedom to be kids, to run in their own story, to even get hurt. Which is why more kids, especially in the West, are obese and anxious and Ritalin-filled and incapable.

"The nurse from my kids' school in Kampala called yesterday morning," I said. "She told me to come and get my son. He'd hurt his back in the playground. I said, 'Ice it and give him some Tylenol. I'll pick him up at the usual time.'"

Sure enough, a bit bruised and swollen, my son

not "celery." Listen, go get Uncle Paul another drink.

But when our hero checked for the fund it was not there, for it has been fecklessly squandered on the evils of Unlimited Data Plans, Impulse Buying and Lousy but Expensive Casual Dining. He was filled with remorse and the home was rife with mutual blaming and frenzied threats of a Great and Terrible Austerity Budget to come.

In the meantime, soldiers of good, who looked remarkably like plumbers, came to battle Leaky Basement. They had awesome weapons — jack hammers and picks, shovels and drills — and a great tumult and clattering filled the house.

There was a mighty battle and each time the soldiers drove out Leaky Basement, he and his odorous brethren (No Billy, Odorous Brethren is not a band, but I guess it could be) would mock them and move to a new wall.

The great battle raged for days and then weeks and the most elusive foe was Seeping Sewage and his scent filled the home until visitors would ask, "Are you cooking cabbage or what?"

Finally, the workers rebuilt the walls and drove back the floods and the warriors Sump Pump and Drain Flush beat the foes and even the dank smell of Seeping Sewage was smoted — with the help of many vanilla scented candles of great expense.

But our family was not out of the woods yet. No kids, brace yourselves, for what came next was the greatest terror of all: The Invoice from Hell. (Yes Billy, I think that actually is a band.) And the Invoice from Hell caused in our hero great wailing and gnashing of teeth, even with his dental appliance in place.

A dark sorrow descended on the home because the basement had Stolen Christmas.

Yea, though there would be dryness and a lack of swampy odour, alas there would be no cheer. But then, like a miracle, a shining light came out of the financial darkness.

It was Little Baby Visa!

And with Little Baby Visa came the Angel, Home Equity Line of Credit, and three semi-wise men from a Banking Land far away: Unsecured Personal Line of Credit, the much abused OverDraft Protection and finally Uncle Vito who always carries a roll of hundreds that could choke a camel. But you gotta watch the "vig."

And so Little Baby Visa saved Christmas and there was much rejoicing and a fair bit of fruitcake eating.

The End.

Paul Benedetti is a Hamilton resident and former Spectator reporter who now teaches journalism at Western University.

It's more than mere words

Remember, Christmas story begins with angel's 'Don't be afraid'

managed so well that the same afternoon he happily joined his class on a bowling trip. Can you picture this in Canada? Really, why is it verboten to allow children to feel pain?

Maybe we feel our kids aren't doing so badly, that they're responsible and bright and good-natured, if not safe and complicit. But what if they're still empty in their core?

Into this comes Christmas, this day for children, this story about that other child, and these words that are so otherworldly from over time and space.

Now I'm about to board a plane. For the first time in five years, my three children and their mother and I are in Canada for Christmas especially for the kids to experience what they normally don't: snow, a Bulldogs hockey game, extended family and a real Canadian winter holiday.

It's also a chance to be home with many across the GTHA to ponder these words that are more than words, the Christmas story, that dangerous story that starts with an angel's "Don't be afraid," the story of how, as the old Hebrew prophet put it, "the Word became flesh."

Not just flesh, but bone too. And blood. And nerves.

Christ, this human package so vulnerable: a newborn who could have been stepped on by some hopeless donkey; a boy suffering his own playground knocks; a man who still worried his mother sick to the day he was brutally executed in front of her.

And in front of the one he called his Father, the divine Father who somehow allowed it. All before this so-called Word rose from below to say this is the mystery, the paradox, that there is purpose and a certain holiness in it all, in your own story. In mine.

You can throw an ocean of other words on pretty well anything else under the sun. Some have their own purpose and undeniable beauty.

But, really, can any compare to this Emmanuel, this "God with us," this strange and noble gift given to the world on that first Christmas Day?

Author and journalist Thomas Froese is a Hamiltonian in East Africa most of the year. Read his blog on fatherhood at dailydad.net and other commentaries at thomasfroese.com

SPEC

BRIEFLY

Short and excerpted comments sent to letters@thespec.com

Election time! We are ready to listen

Congratulations to a recent letter writer who says no to the Liberals' higher gas tax. He hit all the nails right on the head.

I would like to add to his excellent advice to our negligent provincial government: I don't care if Kathleen Wynne loves to run, I don't care if she likes to set hard-to-achieve goals and I don't care about Toronto's transportation system — I never go there. Get your spending under control. The big issue is still the economy and the lack of promised jobs, in the private sector not the public sector. The only way a government can "create" jobs is to create an economic atmosphere that nurtures business and that means lowering taxes and energy costs, not raising them! I second the motion to go to the polls, the sooner the better, and the other two parties better get their campaign platforms geared up. We are ready to listen.

SUSAN A. FRANDSEN, ROCKTON

A mean thief ruins Christmas

I would like to wish a very Merry Christmas to the thief who watched an envelope be placed in our mailbox on Dec. 12 at 1 p.m. and helped themselves to that envelope before 2 p.m. (We know it wasn't the mailman because he came at 2.30 that day.)

The thief must have guessed there was cash in that envelope. That money was left for my son. He had planned to purchase a warm pair of winter boots and a few Thomas the Tank Engine gifts for his three-year-old son. Unfortunately, that money cannot easily be replaced. My son is on Ontario Works and works through temp agencies when they call, which isn't often, and I work for minimum wage, which doesn't leave a whole lot after bills.

But to that thief, have yourself a Merry Christmas. I hope your feet are warm and your eyes filled with joy!

CHARLENE PROWSE, HAMILTON

Motherlode makes my Monday

Lorraine Sommerfeld's column about the feral cat was the most powerful writing I have ever seen. I anxiously await every Monday when Motherlode appears in The Spectator. It's the highlight of the Monday paper.

DAVEROHR, HAMILTON