

Our View

A suddenly serious subject

For the past several weeks, Prime Minister Stephen Harper has said he's not concerned about his cabinet minister's private lives.

Harper repeated his position again at a news conference on Monday, in response to yet another question about the relationship between Maxime Bernier and Julie Couillard.

"I have no intention of commenting on a minister's former girlfriend," Harper said. "I don't take this subject seriously."

A few hours later, however, the prime minister was forced to take it seriously as Bernier tendered his resignation as foreign affairs minister, in advance of the broadcast of a tell-all interview Couillard gave to a Quebec television station.

Couillard told TVA that Bernier had left classified government documents at her apartment, and she only recently returned them on the advice of her lawyer. She also contradicted the government's earlier claim that Bernier was "genuinely not aware" of her past relationships with people close to the Hells Angels until recent "media interest" brought attention to it. She said Bernier knew all along.

In retrospect, it looks like opposition MPs were right to raise questions about Bernier's judgment. We still think the way the Liberals and Bloc Quebecois treated Couillard was unfair, but it turns out they were at least barking up the right tree when they simply asked whether there was anything to be concerned about regarding her relationship with a high-ranking cabinet minister. It turns out there was — but not because of any wrongdoing on her part, as was implied.

The concern, rather, rested with Bernier and Bernier alone. How could he be so careless as to leave sensitive NATO documents lying around where they shouldn't be? That indeed puts a giant question mark over his judgment as foreign affairs minister.

Now, Canadians should also be asking questions about the way the prime minister handled this affair.

In light of Bernier's earlier gaffes, why would Harper steadfastly refuse to even acknowledge there might be a problem with the foreign affairs minister's private relationships getting too close to his public responsibilities? Why would the PM be so quick to dismiss what turned out to be very legitimate questions? Why, by his own admission, would he not take this subject "seriously" until Bernier had to resign over what the PM then called a "very serious mistake?"

So far, Harper has brushed off such questions. But he can't dodge them forever. Even left unanswered, they raise concerns about his own judgment in selecting and maintaining a cabinet.

Day of Inspiration lives up to its name

Congratulations to Terri Roulette McCartney, Roxann Barker, Anishinabe Atisokaywin Inc., and all the others who helped put on A Day of Inspiration at the Westman Centennial Auditorium this week.

As the Sun reported yesterday, this one-day event brought together a variety of inspirational leaders from across Canada and around the world to help open people's eyes to their own potential.

The message was geared to a general audience but particularly aimed at Westman's aboriginal community. First Nations leaders like Chief Clarence Louie of the Osoyoos Indian Band in British Columbia were among the speakers.

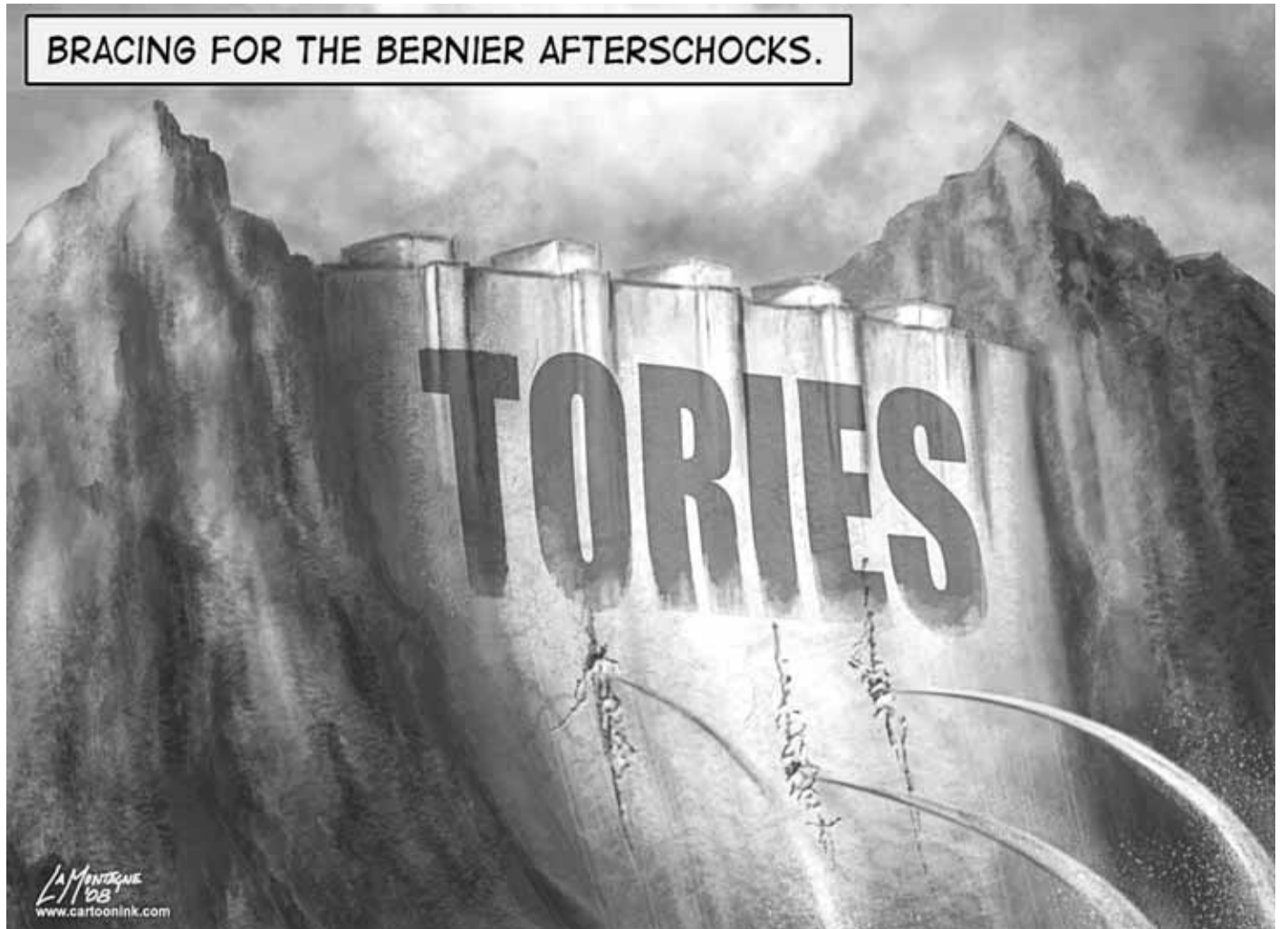
Chief Louie has become famous for his frank and authentic talk, routinely advising many of his fellow aboriginals to "get off their butts" and seek education and employment in order to improve their lives. He brought a similar tough but true message to Brandon.

Other presenters included: John Kim Bell, an aboriginal orchestral conductor and Order of Canada recipient; Kimmie Weeks, a Liberian advocate for peace and social justice; as well as Elaine Bomberry, a successful aboriginal television producer.

The event also featured a showcase from local employers, organizations and educational institutions. This was a smart way to give the hundreds of people who participated the chance to get motivated and then connect with the opportunities that are out there — all under one roof.

We imagine A Day of Inspiration will have a direct impact on many Westman residents' lives, and we hope the same is true when similar events are held in Thompson and Winnipeg this fall.

BRACING FOR THE BERNIER AFTERSHOCKS.



Local Viewpoint

Support for the skate park is support for downtown

I haven't got around to it yet, but I've been meaning to put \$200 toward the Brandon Skate Plaza.

That's enough to "buy" a yard of concrete for the facility and get a neat little plaque with your name on it once the thing is eventually built.

I think a downtown skate park would be great for Brandon, and I've liked the sounds of this fundraising idea ever since it was announced last November. I'm sort of lazy when it comes to these kind of things, though, and I still haven't filled in a pledge form.

Well, I'm going to do that this week, because I think it's important for this project to happen as quickly as possible.

There's more at stake here than simply giving skaters a better place to practise their tricks. This project is one of three going on within three blocks of Princess Avenue and, properly combined, they could create the kind of critical mass that will be needed to spark a real downtown renewal in this city.

Just across Ninth Street from the proposed site for the skate plaza is Princess Park, a nice downtown greenspace that is unfortunately under-used and has developed a bad reputation due to some of the

Robson Fletcher



JADED OPTIMIST

Robson Fletcher is the editorial page editor of the Brandon Sun. He tends to look at the bright side of things but still gets cynical sometimes. His column appears Wednesdays. » rfletcher@brandonsun.com

"unsavoury" characters who sometimes hang out in the area.

Starting tomorrow night, however, Princess Park will see a new level of activity — and security, courtesy of OBO — as Renaissance Brandon puts on the first of its weekly "Thursday by the Fountain" events, which are set to happen all summer long. These events will bring a hodgepodge of different attractions to the park, including live bands, outdoor fitness classes and merchants selling everything from food to books to lingerie.

"We're hoping it just evolves and grows every week," Jeanne Millis of Renaissance Brandon said. "The more the merrier."

Then, of course, just across Eighth Street from the park is the former Beaubier Hotel, which the city now owns and plans to demolish later this summer to make way for the expansion of the Brandon Family YMCA.

The replacement of a seedy old hotel with a family-oriented aquatics centre will create a highly visible, physical change in the city's core area. Combine that with a change of atmosphere at Princess Park, and you've got the potential to start changing people's attitudes about downtown Brandon.

Good things tend to happen in threes, however, and the impact of this transformation would be exponentially heightened with another tangible change on the other side of Ninth Street.

In other words, the sooner construction starts on the Brandon Skate Plaza, the better.

Money remains the main barrier for that million-dollar project, however, and fundraising efforts are still in the "initial stages," according

to skate park committee member Marlow Kirton.

"We've had pretty good response from the public that are coming forward with their \$200 at a time to kind of get the wheels moving," he said. "But projects like this really rely heavily on a major contributor coming forward."

It wasn't until The Burns Family Foundation came forward with a \$1-million donation, for example, that Winnipeg's world-class skate park went from dream to reality.

The Brandon Skate Plaza almost certainly won't happen without some kind of similar, large-scale contribution. Hopefully, some deep-pocketed person or group will step forward soon.

If construction on the skate park happens at roughly the same time as the YMCA expansion, and Princess Park is successfully turned into a popular and safe place to hang out, it would make a convincing case that downtown Brandon is on the upswing.

That kind of momentum tends to build on itself, and I bet it wouldn't be long before we'd start to see more fun and exciting things happening in the city's core.

Looking Back

From the files of the Brandon Sun
Compiled by Cathy Arthur

Daily air service coming to Brandon

SIXTY YEARS AGO

Air transport will become a reality to Brandon and district on June 1 when Trans-Canada Air Lines adds this thriving area in southwestern Manitoba to its 1,700 miles of airline network, which currently is serving the three Prairie provinces. Eastbound flights will depart from Brandon at 10 a.m. and arrive in Winnipeg at 10:55 a.m. Westbound flights will leave Winnipeg at 6:05 p.m. and arrive in Brandon at 7:10 p.m. following the 120-mile flight.

FIFTY YEARS AGO

The first regional library in Manitoba was officially opened in Souris by the Hon. W.C. Miller.

Dr. M.W. Johns, professor of Physics at McMaster University, has been elected to Fellowship in the Royal Society of Canada, it was announced in Ottawa today. Prof. Johns taught at Brandon College for eight years before spending a year at Chalk River, and joined the faculty of McMaster in 1947.

Hon. R.W. Bend, the provincial minister of health and welfare, laid the cornerstone of the Children's Aid Society's new administration building at the corner of Rosser Avenue and 18th Street.

FORTY YEARS AGO

Adriaan C. de Hoog, son of Mr. and Mrs. A.H. de Hoog of Brandon, has been awarded a National Research Council research scholarship. The NRC grant, valued at \$3,600, is one of the awards won by Mr. de Hoog at the end of the 1967-68 school term. He was also awarded the E.L. Harrington prize for the University of Saskatchewan student graduating with a degree in honours physics with the best record in physics and related classes.

"Lonesome" George Gobel will headline the second half of the Manitoba Exhibition's 1968 grandstand show. He will be on the Exhibition stage July 4, 5, and 6.

THIRTY YEARS AGO

Council gave the city engineering department authority to construct a right turn yield lane at 13th Street and Richmond Avenue as well as a new entrance and exit into the exhibition grounds off 18th Street.

Two Brandon businessmen, Ken Fraser of Christie School Supply and Henry Rempel of Behlen-Wickes, have been appointed to the board of directors of McKenzie Seeds of Brandon.

TWENTY YEARS AGO

U.S. President Ronald Reagan, poised for his first visit to the Soviet Union and his fourth meeting with Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, urged the Kremlin to release all political prisoners, allow free emigration and introduce full religious tolerance.

Some seasonal employees from Carnation Foods Company Ltd. of Carberry will find themselves without jobs next year when they are replaced by machines. The potato processing plant will install three high speed automatic defect removal machines on its processing line this summer.

TEN YEARS AGO

Cindy Grant, a scientist at the local Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada research station, was selected by the U.S.-based Potash and Phosphate Institute as the top junior scientist in North America. This is her second major international award. In 1994, she was given the Paris-based International Fertilizer's young professional award.

Phil Hartman, the voice of Troy McClure on "The Simpsons," was found shot dead in his California home today. Police said he was apparently murdered by his wife, who then killed herself.

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"No man is an island, entire of itself. Every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main Never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee." — John Donne