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MONDAY, JANUARY 24, 2022

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**ANALYSIS**

**Election year changes Legault's tone**

Mixed messages reflect his wish to move past the pandemic crisis

**PHILIP AUTHIER**

**QUEBEC** One day, Premier François Legault says there's light at the end of the tunnel.

A few days later, Health Minister Christian Dubé says the hospital system is caught up in a terrible storm with workers at the end of their rope, and Quebec's COVID-19 restrictions are not about to be eased soon.

Confused? You are not alone. With Quebecers in the midst of another bleak winter spent under

pandemic restrictions, questions abound about what the future holds. The answers are not really coming from elected leaders anywhere on the planet.

But in the halls of Quebec power, another deadline looms: the October 2022 general election. Beyond its day-in, day-out crisis management, the big question for the Coalition Avenir Québec government is how to get past the pandemic, which has again sideswiped its original agenda.

Analysts say politics explain

the mixed signals coming from the top as illustrated, for example, in Legault's habit of tweeting out "good news" items on the pandemic on the same day as bad news comes out.

Then there are his more personal social media messages, such as suggestions on Twitter of a good book to read on a cold day hunkered down at home. He loves to heap praise on Quebecers — such as arts or sports figures — who shine in their fields.

For longer messages, Legault uses his Facebook page, usually on a Sunday. He will often appeal to Quebecers' sense of solidarity and nationalism, signing off his messages with the more personal

"Your premier."

Some Quebecers appreciate his candour. Others do not, lashing out using their own social media. The backlash was so bad that just before Christmas Legault called for a truce between people attacking each other on social media or in person so everyone could get through the Omicron crisis.

It could be, as *Le Devoir* columnist Michel David wrote Jan. 15, that Legault is worried about the political impact the pandemic is having. He wants Quebecers to start smiling again before their discontent with living this way crystallizes — or worse, they opt to take it out on the CAQ at the ballot box.

SEE LEGAULT ON **A3**



JOHN MAHONEY

**SAVING CHINATOWN**

May Chiu, left, and Murielle Chan of Progressive Chinese of Quebec, and Chinatown preservation activist Jean-Philippe Riopel celebrate news that parts of Chinatown, including this section of de La Gauchetière St., will be classified as a heritage site. Zoning will also change to reduce maximum building heights, *Marian Scott* reports. **A4**

**EMSB puts the emphasis on diversity**



**ALLISON HANES**

Students in Grades 1 and 2 at St. Monica Elementary in Notre-Dame-de-Grâce had a reading of the book *Dear Black Girls* on Friday morning by author, educator and facilitator Shanice Nicole.

The virtual presentation was held in advance of Black History Month in February. But it is just one of many such events planned during a week of activities to

promote diversity and inclusion at the English Montreal School Board.

Every year, the board picks a theme to help promote its schools to eligible parents in the lead-up to kindergarten registration, which starts Jan. 31, and this time the focus is diversity, said EMSB director general Nick Katalifos.

"We really believe it's one of our strengths, whether it's our students, our employees, we have so much diversity and it's something we should really celebrate," he said.

The emphasis on inclusion is broad. Not only does this mean embracing various racial, cultur-

al and religious backgrounds, but Indigenous Montrealers, special needs students and members of the LGBTQ community, too.

But this year's theme is just the tip of the iceberg signalling a much deeper commitment toward making diversity a priority. "It's not just about this year or a week's worth of activities," Katalifos said. "It's really one of our long-term objectives. And more than that, it's part of our identity."

The EMSB recently struck a committee to bring a lens of inclusion to all aspects of its operations. The board wants to be proactive instead of reactive. SEE HANES ON **A4**



**YOU**

**BARKER**  
Create a workout space to sweat it out at home **A10**

## City rejects comedian's offer of free mini-shelters for homeless

RENÉ BRUMMER

Montreal comedian Mike Ward has offered to supply 25 "mini-homes" to serve as individual shelters for the city's unhoused population during the recent cold snap.

In a tweet addressed to Montreal Mayor Valérie Plante on Saturday afternoon as the temperature hovered around -17 C, Ward said the homes could be set up within a week, and would provide lodging to those most at risk who refuse to sleep in the city's shelters.

"I had 25 shelters built (for the unhoused) that I offered to your team last year," he wrote. "The offer still holds. These are wooden tents, insulated, heated with the warmth of the human body. They will house you comfortably up to 30."

"A simple yes from you and no one else will die this winter."

Two unhoused individuals have died in Montreal in the last two weeks during the extreme cold. The forecast for the coming days predicts night time temperatures below -10 until next weekend, with some nights below -20.

Ward's offer was rebuffed by Plante in a response on Twitter, who wrote the problem is not with a lack of spots in the city's shelters, but rather a lack of personnel to staff them.

"Thank you for your offer," read the response on Plante's official Twitter account. "We also don't want to see anyone left behind."

"Homelessness is a complex problem that requires well-planned solutions," which is why the city of Montreal works with public health and community organizations to find remedies and house people, Plante wrote.

Ward could not be reached for comment on Saturday.

The comedian announced in November 2020 he had decided



Mike Ward

to buy 25 of the mini-homes after seeing a news report about a Toronto carpenter who was building them and giving them away to unhoused people.

Ward said at the time he would not give them directly to people because he was worried the city would take them away, as happened in Toronto. Instead, he put out a request on Twitter to individuals or organizations who would be willing to put a home on their private property.

Ideally, Ward said, it would be a shelter that would take them on, so recipients could have access to toilets.

"But at the worst, a church, mosque or synagogue," Ward wrote. "By doing so, you can brag that your religion is better than the others — hahaha."

Toronto city officials interviewed in a CBC report said they did not favour the use of the unauthorized outdoor shelters because they represented too many risks, including fire, and preferred to focus on increasing shelter capacity.

Carpenter Khaled Seiwright said his mini-homes weren't intended as a permanent solution.

"This is just to make sure people don't die in the cold this winter, somehow."

The mini-homes idea is not without precedent.

In December, actor and former California governor Arnold Schwarzenegger donated 25 tiny homes at a cost of \$250,000 as part of the Village for Veterans program that supplies transitional housing for unhoused veterans.

The small homes have a bed, shelving, electricity, heating and air conditioning. They are situated in a permanent community of tiny homes, currently numbering 78, that offers other services, including support to move the residents into full-time housing.

rbrummer@postmedia.com



Author Shanice Nicole reads her latest book by video conferencing with Grades 1 and 2 at St. Monica's Elementary School on Friday, while spiritual community animator Samantha Smith looks on. The virtual presentation was held in advance of Black History Month in February. PIERRE O'BENRAUP

## Board to recruit teachers of different backgrounds

HANES FROM A1

Among the committee's goals is ensuring a respectful awareness about diversity is taught in the classroom in ways that are appropriate for a range of age groups. For older students, this also means helping frame sometimes controversial current events.

The board plans to do outreach with various communities and groups who could be partners in these efforts. The EMSB also hopes to recruit staff with different backgrounds to better reflect the makeup of the student body and help address the teacher shortage.

The search is on for an Indigenous education consultant who will bring a knowledgeable perspective on how to convey painful chapters in history while

acknowledging modern-day injustices.

Although all new immigrants to Quebec have been required to go to French school since Bill 101 was introduced in the 1970s, the EMSB's population is remarkably diverse. It speaks to the fact the English-speaking community itself is made up of many creeds and cultures.

The elected council of commissioners of the EMSB has never shied away from crossing swords with the government of Premier François Legault on questions of minority rights.

Although other English boards opposed it, the EMSB was the only one to join the court challenge against Bill 21, Quebec's law preventing teachers, among other authority figures, from wearing the hijab, kippah, turban or other religious insignia. It's

also among the boards fighting Bill 40, which would abolish school boards and replace them with service centres, infringing on constitutionally enshrined minority education rights. And it has been vocal in denouncing aspects of Bill 96, Quebec's proposed legislation to strengthen protections for the French language, which would come at the expense of the rights of English speakers.

This activism has at times got it in hot water with Legault. And the EMSB has often found itself taking sides in some of the most heated debates in Quebec.

But the open and tolerant tone set by the elected members filters down throughout the organization.

"I'm most proud of the team here," Katalifos said. "The team wants to do this. They're very

excited about it. They're very motivated. They know that this is the right thing to do. They know that it's important in terms of where we've headed in the future as an organization."

"This is a genuine and very concrete initiative. We want to make sure it's the base of operations in terms of the services we're offering our students, and in terms of the image of our school board. It matters and it's important that this message gets out."

Which is why the promotion of diversity will be so prominent in many classrooms this week.

Down town, kindergarten students at FACE School are having a workshop on what they can express with their bodies with the board's sex-ed consultant, while Grade 6 students at Piers de Couberlin Elementary in St-Léonard are sharing what they learned from the school's Hispanic Heritage Project with the kindergarten class.

"It's a theme we've all taken to heart as an organization, but it has to start with the students," Katalifos said.

ahanes@postmedia.com

## Province, Montreal to protect Chinatown's heritage

MARIAN SCOTT

Community organizations and residents in Chinatown are celebrating news that the Quebec government and city of Montreal intend to protect the historic neighbourhood.

"It's a wonderful, wonderful way to start the Year of the Tiger," May Chiu, a member of the Progressive Chinese of Quebec, said Sunday.

Quebec Culture Minister Nathalie Roy has called an 11 a.m. news conference today to announce provincial protection for the heritage district, threatened by real estate development.

Meanwhile, city council will amend Montreal's urban plan to preserve the neighbourhood's built heritage, according to the agenda for its monthly meeting today.

At a special meeting Friday, the city's executive committee approved changes to the urban plan, including new limits on building heights and densities in the district. Public consultations will be held on the zoning changes.

Council will also vote on an interim resolution preventing any new developments that do not respect the revised zoning.

"I am extremely happy, although obviously we did not get everything we wanted," said Jean-Pierre Riopel, a tenant on the Gauchetière St. who sounded the alarm last year after his building and several others on the block were acquired by developers Brandon Shiller and Jeremy Kornbluth, who have made headlines for the "renoviction" of tenants across the city.

Roy will classify the block bounded by de la Gauchetière, St-Urbain, Côté Sts. and Viger Ave. as a Quebec heritage site and designate it as the "institutional hub" of Chinatown. Radio-Canada reported Saturday.

The former British and Canadian School at 1009 Côté St., at



Culture Minister Nathalie Roy is expected to announce today that parts of Chinatown will be classified as a heritage district. JOHN MAHONEY

the corner of de la Gauchetière St., will also be classified, it said. Now the Wing's noodle factory, the four-storey stone building designed by James O'Donnell, the architect of Notre-Dame Basilica, is Montreal's oldest purpose-built school.

The former Davis tobacco factory at 987-991 Côté St. will also be designated a provincial heritage site, the report said. Built in 1884, it incorporates exterior walls of the 1848 former Free Presbyterian Church.

The block also includes stone houses dating from the mid-19th century, when the area was still being developed into an urban neighbourhood.

Meanwhile, the city of Montreal will designate the block as a "sector of exceptional value."

"What I would have really wanted is a heritage classification for the whole of Chinatown," Riopel said, "just like Old Montreal and Mount Royal."

"But it's an excellent start and it's fantastic that we were able to achieve this in just one year," said Riopel, who launched an online petition to the Quebec National

Assembly in May calling for Chinatown to be designated as a historic district.

Chiu also said she hoped Monday's announcements would be just the start.

"I think that so far the consensus of the community is that it's an amazing first step and I need to emphasize first because heritage protection is just one of the items in the Chinatown Action Plan," she said.

Chiu questioned why only one block was receiving protection.

"We're very happy, but we need to be cautiously going forward with the government to make sure that heritage protection is something that's going to be considered holistically and not piecemeal," she said.

Chiu also called for protection of "intangible heritage like the family associations, social organizations and religious organizations that were all part of the very rich fabric of (the area)," she said.

Montreal's proposed zoning by-law will reduce maximum heights for new buildings from 20 storeys to about eight.

Pierre Guillot-Hurtubise, prin-

icipal vice-president of National public relations and media adviser to Shiller and Kornbluth, said the developers would examine "the exact content of the announcement" before commenting.

Until now, Chinatown has fallen through the cracks when it comes to heritage protection, said Dinu Bumbu, policy director for Heritage Montreal.

"Hopefully what happens tomorrow will turn the page and open a new chapter for that area," he said by video chat from Dubai. "Chinatown is very important but it was not duly acknowledged, so this is being corrected."

Real estate development has increasingly hemmed in the district, one of the first areas outside Old Montreal to develop.

It's important that it be recognized "properly as a heritage place, not just yet another commercial venue," he said.

There's a growing understanding of "the different layers of the heritage of Chinatown, from the Scots, the French, the Jewish people, the Irish, of course the Chinese," Bumbu said.

Bounded by Jeanne-Mance St., René-Lévesque Blvd., St-Dominique St. and Viger Ave., the district is the last surviving Chinatown in Quebec.

Over the years, it has lost territory to mega projects like the Palais des Congrès and Guy-Favreau Complex, which amputated a third of its territory in the 1970s and 1980s.

Roy and Plante announced the creation of a working group in May to recommend measures to preserve Chinatown.

An illustration of Montreal's "cultural mix," the district "is also a reflection of our open and welcoming society," Roy said.

"The result is a unique ensemble in North America of which we are proud and which we must protect and enhance," she said at the time.

msscott@postmedia.com