

CANADA



Food and crying go hand in hand on hoax website Cryingwhileeating.com. Will, for instance, was so upset after Anakin Skywalker was lured to the dark side in the latest Star Wars film, above, he had to have a cry — and chips, washed down with a wine cooler.

PM vows to give mayors role in nation-building

Municipalities to be consulted before every budget, Martin tells conference

BY RICHARD FOOT

ST. JOHN'S, Nfld. — Calling his new deal for cities a “national project” as historic as the building of the CP Railway or the creation of medicare, Prime Minister Paul Martin vowed yesterday to give the country’s mayors a starring role in national decision making.

He promised to consult municipalities before the creation of every federal budget.

He said the federal government would continue to seek permanent new sources of direct municipal funding — along the lines of sharing gasoline taxes, a central pillar of the new deal — and he said towns and cities should help “establish the objectives of the nation” and “guide where we, as a country, are going.”

Mr. Martin’s speech yesterday, at the annual meeting of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, was cheered by 2,000 mayors and councillors from across the country.

Ann MacLean, the federation’s president, shouted moments after Mr. Martin left the podium: “We have been promised a seat at the national table.”

Other mayors predicted trouble with the provinces, whose governments have constitutional jurisdiction over municipalities and who have long opposed federal meddling in municipal affairs.

“We all understand the constitutional realities of this country, so it’s going to be interesting to see how this issue shakes itself out,” said a skeptical Andy Wells, mayor of St. John’s.

“We’re partners now with the federal government,” said Vancouver Mayor Larry Campbell, adding that Canada’s mayors could even expect a seat at first ministers meetings.

“We could very easily be there. That’s the meaning of partnership,” he said. “But some provinces aren’t going to be happy about it.”

Mr. Martin was vague about precisely how he would give mayors a voice at the national table.

“We recognize the role of the provinces. We have no intention of engaging in constitutional wrangling,” he told reporters.

“But there is a very clear recognition” that municipalities are “an essential order of government and it is a question

of respect for both their qualifications, their objectives, and the betterment of the national purpose.”

Mr. Martin’s new deal with cities first took shape before the last federal election when he promised municipalities new sources of funding to make up for the shortfalls imposed on them in the 1990s, when, as finance minister, Mr. Martin began slashing federal spending to kill the deficit.

Many federal cuts offloaded onto provinces were in turn passed on to towns and cities.

Last year, with many communities facing an infrastructure crisis, the Martin government increased the municipal GST rebate to 100 per cent. In this year’s budget, it has proposed sharing a small portion of federal gas tax revenues, transferring to municipalities about \$5 billion over the next five years.

Mayors are eager to have that money, but they first need the agreement of their provincial governments. So far, only British Columbia, Alberta and the Yukon have agreed to allow federal gas tax transfers to municipalities.

To get the gas tax, mayors also need Parliament to pass the federal budget, now held up by the opposition in the House of Commons.

Mr. Martin chided Conservative leader Stephen Harper yesterday for failing to push the budget through the committee stage. He also mocked Mr. Harper for telling the mayors on Saturday that a Conservative government would honour, and even enrich, the Liberal gas tax sharing plan.

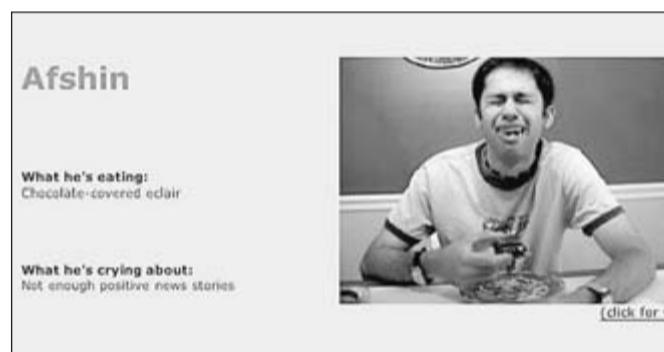
“I’m told Stephen Harper was here ... to tell you that he really wants new sources of funding for cities,” Mr. Martin said.

Today, he’s going to be “back in Ottawa, doing everything possible to delay passage of the budget, which contains the money that you need. Today flip, tomorrow flop.”

Ms. MacLean, however, told reporters later that she accepted Mr. Harper’s assurances on gas taxes. Federal Conservative infrastructure critic Rahim Jaffer, who was observing the convention, also said his party would be willing to pass legislation approving the gas tax plan “on Monday” if it was separated from the main budget legislation — something the Liberals refuse to do.

People who cry while they eat? Sure, there’s a website for that

OK, so it’s a hoax, one of many in a contest to demonstrate how ideas spread on the Internet. But the fact the top entrants have more than a million hits is no joke, **MISTY HARRIS** writes.



There are more than 40 videos on Cryingwhileeating.com, including Afshin, who is crying while eating a chocolate-covered éclair because there aren’t enough positive stories in the news.

In times of emotional distress, the kitchen is where the broken-hearted go to lick their wounds. Now there’s a website that makes public the private — and ultimately hilarious — practice of crying while eating.

One video shows “Catherine” crying over her crackers because “her cat has asthma.” A second video documents “Daniel” weeping into his buckwheat noodles and rooster sauce because “he ruined Passover.” Still another shows “Will” drowning his sorrows with a wine cooler and eating chips because he’s “not convinced by Anakin’s turn to the dark side” in the latest instalment of the *Star Wars* epic.

In all, there are more than 40 tearful noshers featured on Cryingwhileeating.com. The hoax site is part of Contagious Media Showdown, a viral marketing contest designed to reveal the ways in

which certain campaigns and ideas spread on the Internet. Less than three weeks into the competition, which runs through June 9, the top five entrants have collectively drawn more than one million unique visitors to their respective sites. And the numbers swell with each passing hour.

“This embodies everything we’ve been saying about the power and potential of word of mouth,” says Pete Blackshaw, co-founder of the Word of Mouth Marketing Association. “Consumers are almost beginning to compete, in a de facto manner, with folks that are paid to make advertising interesting.”

Although not professionally affiliated with the contest, Mr. Blackshaw says he and other marketers have

been closely following its results. He notes some of the most effective entries defy traditional wisdom about what makes a viral campaign stick.

“You think, ‘Why would someone share this?’” Mr. Blackshaw says of Cryingwhileeating.com, currently ranked second out of the contest’s 60 entries. “It gives us some good things to reflect upon.”

At press time, forgetmenoties.com, an entry created by two B.C. women — was leading the pack with nearly 500,000 visitors. The absurd site advertises women’s underwear equipped with a global positioning system that allows the wearer’s location and body temperature to be secretly tracked wherever she

goes. Other popular entries include thebrainfreeze.com, on which people can watch videos of 7-11 customers purposefully inducing cold headaches with Slurpees; ringtonedancer.contagious-media.org, where a masked man dressed in superhero garb boogies to a ringtone rendition of Tchaikovsky; and blogebriety.com, a gossip site that gives bloggers (online diarists) the tabloid treatment.

“We just think it’s fascinating that you can share something with 10 friends and it ends up reaching millions of people,” says Jonah Perretti, head of research and development for contest sponsor Eyebeam. The non-profit New York company is dedicated to studying and furthering the applications of creative technology.

“Most people don’t even know (the sites) have anything to do with the Showdown competition.”

According to Mr. Perretti, Eyebeam’s key motivation in hosting the contest isn’t marketing, but rather the motivations that drive the “bored at work network” to forward certain website links and ignore others.

Contest winners, who will share a total of \$5,000 U.S. in prize money, will be announced in late June.

U.S. prosecutor picking on teen for wearing Canada T-shirt: lawyer

Canadian youth accused of making ‘terroristic threats’ against school

BY CRISTIN SCHMITZ

A “brilliant” Canadian youth charged with making a terrorist threat against his Philadelphia-area high school is a victim of American politicking, his lawyer said yesterday.

The case of Travis Biehn has “nothing to do with terrorism,” William Goldman Jr. said.

The 17-year-old — who moved to the U.S. with his parents and younger sister from Newfoundland in 1997 — appeared Friday at an intake hearing at Bucks County Juvenile Court on charges of “making terroristic threats” and possessing an in-

terfering device. In the family’s first comment on the case — they haven’t talked to American media — Mr. Goldman said the implication that Travis is anti-American because he wore a Canadian T-shirt to his hearing, is “nonsense.”

The county’s chief prosecutor, District Attorney Diane Gibbons, had pointed out that Travis wore a T-shirt in court boasting of his Canadian heritage.

“He apparently has made it clear that he does not like America and that he would prefer to be in Canada,” Ms. Gibbons

is quoted as saying in the *Philadelphia Inquirer*.

She made a point of emphasizing to reporters last week that Travis and his family — who moved to the U.S. for Travis’s father’s job — are Canadians.

Mr. Goldman accused Ms. Gibbons of politicking: “Give me a break, it’s an election year for her.”

The computer-savvy youth, described as a harmless joker by his friends, was suspended two months ago from Central Bucks High School East after he hacked into the school’s computers. He had returned to school and officials there said they did not believe he was bullied by his peers. Nor did they suspect a Columbine-type attack was in the works since a

threat had been scrawled on the wall of a boys washroom more than a week ago warning the school would be bombed last Friday.

The school was shut down Friday, but bomb-sniffing dogs came up with nothing.

Authorities accuse Travis of making the threat. The prosecution says when they searched his parents’ home in Buckingham, a community 50 kilometres north of Philadelphia, last week they seized 3.6 to 4.5 kilograms of potassium nitrate, fuses, containers and other materials that can be used to build a bomb.

The Canadian T-shirt Travis wore to court Friday was what he had on when he was arrested at home late Thursday and thrown in jail. “He was arrested

without notice, and he was wearing a T-shirt bought at a tourist shop along the Canadian border,” Mr. Goldman said.

“I believe the shirt said ‘I am a Canadian. I don’t live in an igloo. My favourite sport is ice hockey.’ I mean come on!” Mr. Goldman said.

“The papers here are trying to put a spin that it’s anti-American (but) that’s nonsense. That’s baloney. This is totally out of proportion. This is not an anti-American situation. This is not a terrorist situation ... and to the extent that the prosecution has painted it as such, it is inaccurate.”

Mr. Goldman suggested: “Canadians should be irate. Because a young man, a Canadian citizen, is proud of Canada does not make them anti-American.”

Ms. Gibbons also said Travis had all the necessary ingredients to construct a bomb, but said police found only small casings in his room, not the large containers that would be required to make a large bomb.

“We do not have a completed bomb. We have everything you need to have to make a bomb,” she said.

Potassium nitrate is a legal and unlicensed substance that can be used to make glass and candle wicks, but it can be explosive if combined with charcoal and sulfur. Authorities also said they found more than a dozen illegal firecrackers in Travis’s parents’ house.

Travis is being held in custody pending a hearing later this month. He has not entered a plea.

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