

POLITICS AS USUAL: Canada Day reflection

By Alison Collins-Mrakas

I hope everyone had a lovely long weekend.

I certainly did.

I enjoyed a wide variety of events in celebration of Canada's 150th birthday; from the somewhat odd giant duck in Toronto (my rowing team rowed across the harbour to get up close and personal with it ? and get some very good shots. Suffice it to say it is enormous...and quite weird) ? to the truly spectacular fireworks display at home in Aurora in Lambert Willson Park.

It was a wonderful few days. We will leave aside the matter of the bloody rain.

I did have a different column planned for this week, but after a resident reached out to me I have changed tack somewhat.

The resident expressed a desire that I consider a column about being grateful, and in light of the fact that we have just had a nation-wide celebration of being Canadian, I agree that it is an opportune time to have a larger discussion of giving thanks for how fortunate we are.

It is patently obvious that Canadians are very fortunate. Apparently the second best place in the world to live, according to a ranking released this spring. And why not? We have a stable government, a stable economy, good publicly accessible schools, Universal health care, gun control laws, a free press, an orderly judiciary, and a wealth of natural resources ? most important of which is our water.

Canada is home to nearly 20 per cent of the world's fresh water. When fully 1/6 of the world's countries have some kind of water scarcity, our abundant water supply is something we should not take for granted. So, please stop ?washing? your driveways with it.

But, it's not just what we have that makes us fortunate, it's what we can do as well.

As Canadians, we have tremendous opportunities ? for employment, for education, for enjoyment. That little pep talk we are all given in school ? that we can do anything we set our minds to ? is true in Canada, but it isn't true for everyone.

Those opportunities are not equally accessible or equally accessed.

In the midst of all our abundance there is a significant portion of our population that does not or cannot share in the Canadian dream.

The starkest example of this fact? Homeless people.

Visit any major city and you will see homeless people on the streets. Under bridges, in transit shelters, and atop of subway grates.

Think about that. There are people in our community who quite literally have nowhere to go ? day or night. There are clearly a variety of reasons why people are homeless ? from mental health issues to economic ones ? but regardless of why they are homeless, the fact is that they are.

And it isn't just the big cities. Here in Aurora we have homeless people as well. I am sure we have all seen the folks that spend their days and nights just wandering around our Town.

They are not unseen.

From private citizens to various community agencies, many people have offered assistance. Unfortunately, for reasons that are not always known, assistance is not always accepted.

This isn't meant to be a sanctimonious sermon. Just an acknowledgement that as Canadians ? as Aurorans ? we are very fortunate. Happy Canada Day.