

POLITICS AS USUAL: Effective Decision-Making

By Alison Collins-Mrakas

In politics as in life, when folks don't like the outcome they attack the process.

Sometimes it is, well, just grumbling by folks who don't like the outcome. But sometimes it is a fair comment. We've seen many a public venture ? gas plants anyone? ? where the process, such as it is, has been so lacking in transparency as to be opaque. Other times though it's just plain partisan politics. Whatever one side does, the other automatically attacks.

To quote the buzzword of the day, it's tribalism. Folks suspend all common sense to vote with the tribe.

How else to explain the nonsense going on with our neighbours to the south? (I guess I have to be a bit more specific). I am talking about the recent vote in the US Senate, a vote where the Republicans were loudly proclaiming a monumental ?victory? with the passage of a tax reform bill, only in an era of rank and extreme partisanship could the passage of that bill be considered as a victory.

A victory for the politicians maybe, but certainly not a victory for democracy, or democratic principles because they were left trampled on the senate floor amongst the crumpled paper drafts of the bill. Fully 51 members that voted in favour of that Bill had not read it in its final draft form, let alone its entirety. And, being fair, the same could be said for those that voted against it. I seriously doubt rank and file Democrats that are raging about the bill, have read it in full either.

But how could they?

For heaven's sake, there were little scraps of paper with scribbled ?amendments? on it being passed about and voted on. Sorry, but that's bananas. How can you possibly say that the proposed legislation has had a thorough vetting when the ink wasn't even dry on the documents?

How can you vote on proposed changes that are hand written and barely legible? This is legislation that will have serious implications for literally millions upon millions of people. To pass it without so much as a how do you do is shameful.

But let's not be smug about our own legislative processes.

The same thing happens in our parliament, though with far less drama. (However, to the best of my knowledge, our parliamentarians don't write legislation on cocktail napkins and put it to a vote). But looking at the process broadly, large pieces of legislation get tabled for a vote, with minimal time to review and even less time to debate. And even when it is not a whipped vote, it is rare to find any dissent amongst the party that has put the legislation forward. Our members vote along party lines.

Period.

The merits, or lack thereof of any particular agenda item before parliament for consideration, are entirely beside the point ? it's whose idea it is that matters.

Say what you will about municipal politics, but it's the most accessible, for lack of a better word, decision making process of any governmental level. You know exactly how each councillor, mayor, regional councillor feels about a particular issue. There's no hiding behind party.

And I think that's a good thing.