This page was exported from - The Auroran
Export date: Thu Mar 28 14:52:19 2024 / +0000 GMT

BROCK'S BANTER: Master class in out-of-touch

By Brock Weir

In the United States' Presidential Election in 2000, where Vice President Al Gore faced off against former Texas Governor George W. Bush for the country's top job, some people expressed no small measure of surprise when the latter ultimately prevailed.

Florida's electoral nightmare taken out of the equation, how could the cerebral, although slightly aloof, VP lose out to someone who was portrayed as either a buffoon, cosseted scion of a political dynasty, or both, with very little to show on his own track record?

Some pundits boiled it down to a very simple idea: George W. Bush, not Al Gore, was the guy voters wanted to sit down and have a beer with.

Fair enough, but it might even be fairer to say that the folksy Bush was simply the man they related to more.

In a democracy, we elect individuals to represent us so, naturally, we tend to gravitate towards leaders who we can relate to, who we feel have some sort of understanding of our present lives, our goals, our hopes, our dreams, and leaders we feel will defend our interests.

We all want to be represented by someone who is ?in-touch? with the world around us who, in political jargon-speak, has their ?finger on the pulse? of the people.

By our vote, we can only make informed decisions.

We win some, we lose some, and sometimes our hunches fall wildly short of the mark.

Consider the fallout from Thursday afternoon's student walkout.

The statement sent out by the Ontario Government shortly after teens across the country up and left their schools in a form of peaceful protest against a series of changes and funding cuts proposed by the Ministry of Education, sent out in the name of Education Minister Lisa Thompson, was a master class in out-of-touch messaging.

?Today is a disappointing day for Ontario's parents and students,? said the Minister, informing those directly impacted by the education changes how they should feel. ?On a day when we reached out to begin good-faith consultations with Ontario's teachers, we instead are seeing Ontario's teachers' unions condoning a student walkout at schools across the

province. We know teachers' unions organized student walkouts under the previous government. I'm concerned we may be seeing the same thing now as teachers are not discouraging this stunt.?

Stunt.

Consider that word for a moment. It comes up again.

Also consider the admission above that they have no idea whether or not what they claim is true.

But wait, it gets better.

?Instead of focusing on political stunts,? she continued, ?I encourage the unions to instead work cooperatively with us on the real challenges facing Ontario's education system such as the fact that too many of our kids are failing math ? graduating without the skills necessary to successfully enter the workforce. Over half of Ontario's sixth grade students are failing to meet an acceptable standard on their math tests. The teachers' unions have offered no solutions to the math crisis. Instead of focusing on math ? they are now enabling students to skip classes. And even when students are in class, too many teachers are choosing to use students as a captive audience for their union's political agenda.?

To this, the question must be asked when the Minister actually visited a classroom and sat in on a lesson for the last time.

Apparently it is more politically expedient or, at least, more palatable for the base, to create a bogeyman out of unions, a particular hobby horse of this particular group, rather than taking five minutes to talk to students about why they were outside their schools with placards last week.

Had the Minister, or whoever drafted this nonsense, taken that sliver out of their busy schedules, they might have received a valuable education of their own.

The students I spoke to were not out there pushing a union agenda, they were out there fighting for their future, a future that includes funding for arts programs, the resources they need to navigate their special education classes, the right to actually receive an education from a teacher, rather than an online tutorial, where they can ask questions and problem-solve in real time, and a classroom environment where they can raise their hands and be noticed, instead of fighting to be heard over the 40-odd other students in their classrooms.

After all, from my perspective at least, if I wanted to find out what is actually needed in a classroom, my starting point would be to ask students and teachers. Admittedly, that thinking might be just a bit too far outside of the box to fly.

For parents concerned about their kids walking out on Thursday, never fear. The Government is encouraging you to snitch on teachers who, apparently, did not block students from exercising their democratic right for a peaceful protest ? all in the apparent name of ?safety.?

?I want to remind parents that, should they be concerned about their child's safety because of any union support of the walkout, they always have the option to contact the Ontario College of Teachers, which is the regulatory body responsible for teacher misconduct,? the Minister concluded. ?I also want to advise all school boards that I expect them to take action to discipline anyone who abandons their classroom responsibilities. In the private sector, people know that if you skip work without justification you don't get paid. And I want everyone in Ontario to know that we are prepared to take action to give parents peace of mind that no one will use our children as a captive audience or a bargaining chip as part of their union's political games.?

But, it seems it's a-okay to put our children and their futures on the frontlines of government cutbacks.

Had the Minister taken time to speak with the students on Thursday, she would have seen that the vast majority of them were out there with a mission, hoping to have their voices and concerns heard by the people who have the means to make a difference. It seems that these issues, at best, went unheard and, at worst, were simply ignored by those who think they know better.

Almost like asking a child what they want for their birthday and then, once they share their wish list, are dismissed out of hand with a flip, ?Nah, you don't really want that.?

But, at the end of the day, many of the teens who walked out of class on Thursday will be of voting age in the next three years. Let's see if their concerns are taken seriously then.