

POLITICS AS USUAL: The Long Road

By Alison Collins-Mrakas

I was standing in line to grab a coffee and I happened to catch the video feed of a Mayoral debate in Toronto. It was the middle of the day. I couldn't tell if it was live ? though I think it was ? but it struck me: How many bloody debates are they going to do? I have lost count of the ones I have seen. They all tend to blend together. And if their talking head shtick no longer resonates with me (someone who actually pays attention) can you imagine how little impact these neverending televised debates have on the Joe Public? None.

I think most folks take little interest in the municipal election until near the very end. Unless a candidate does something colossally stupid, or completely bizarre, I think the average person pays little heed until they absolutely have to. Even then, as voter turnout records indicate, more than 60 percent of voters don't even bother to mark a ballot.

But back to the Toronto Mayoral debate: The media sit there, debate after boring debate, and wait for Ford or Chow or Tory to make a mistake, or make a headlining grabbing gaffe.

As a side note about the debates ? why is it always only Chow, Tory and Ford? I read that there's something like 25 or more candidates for Mayor in Toronto. Why are they never included in any of the debates?

Who decides who is a legitimate candidate and who is not? Yes, there are obviously quite a few of those folks who have put their name forward, who haven't a hope in heck of gathering even point 1 percent of the vote, let alone a sizeable number.

But that's not the point. All the candidates put their name forward. They all plunked down that same two hundred bucks. They are all legitimate in that sense. They are all certified candidates. They should, therefore, all be given at least one opportunity where they all get to speak and make their case as to why we should vote for them.

If Aurora can do it in under three hours with 40-odd candidates (Mayors, Councillors and trustees) then I think Canada's largest city can somehow manage to run a televised mayoral debate that includes all the candidates. At least once.

Which brings me to my final point. I think that the municipal election period is simply way, way too long. It is just torturous. Personally, I think the length of the election period is actually a detriment to the democratic process. People become fatigued. It fuels an apathetic mindset that results in low voter turnout.

A campaign that started on January 2, and doesn't end until October 27, is interminably long. Provincial and federal contests take mere weeks to complete. Why the disparity? Why are municipal electors subjected to a near years' worth of bombast and blathering? There's only so much a politician can say about municipal infrastructure and tax levies before their heads explode.

Yes, yes, the provincial and federal folks spend months ?non-campaigning? campaigning, sending out ?information? bulletins from their parliamentary offices about how wonderful they are and how awful the others guys are. But, at least they don't have months upon months of debates, and sign shenanigans and door knocking.

If we want people to pay attention, then we need to appeal to the reality of shorter attention spans. The campaign period should be six weeks, max. Signs should be limited to a three week period. There should be at least one occasion when all candidates get to make their pitch, and where ALL candidates get to answer at least one question put to them by the general public.

Change the game, more will play and we'll all win as a consequence.

Until next week, stay informed, stay involved because this is ? after all ? Our Town.