

FRONT PORCH PERSPECTIVE: Round Two

Round Two with Ms. Park's Grade 5 Class

By Stephen Somerville

For those loyal readers of this column, you may recall a couple of weeks back this writer accepted the invitation to come in and discuss government with my son Ryan's Grade Five class at Devins Drive Public School.

I had a wonderful hour and a half with the children, chatting about everything from the size of Canada; the number of provinces and territories, to what representative government and British Parliamentary Democracy is all about.

I was amazed at both their knowledge and the types of questions they asked me.

As Ms. Park knows that I work in the energy business and the students were doing a series on the topic, she invited me in again.

I had an hour and twenty minutes to fill so rather than just do a question and answer session - and as I know a picture is worth a thousand words - I developed a power point presentation, augmented with four short videos from the Ontario Power Authority and showed some small generation models that I have.

We first discussed what energy and electricity is and the different types of energy ? fossil and renewable energy.

We then discussed the different types of energy generation and how it goes from the power station across the transmission lines and then to the distribution lines before the electrons finally get into their homes or school.

The class got a big kick out of the small scale wind turbine and working car engine model that I brought in.

I brought the car model to show how the combustion process works so I could then use this to explain generation from coal, biomass, natural gas and landfill gas.

One of the key messages that I had for the students is that Canada is fortunate - unlike a number of other nations - in that we have a wide diversity of energy supply.

We then looked at a chart that showed the different types of electricity across Canada and I asked the students a number of questions regarding the leading generation type in respective provinces.

We then turned our attention to Ontario's current supply mix and how renewables and conservation are beginning to play a bigger part.

I also stressed that while electricity is so important to us that it can also be dangerous and that the students should never climb any power poles or if they see a power line down on the ground, to never ever approach it. This now seems rather prescient given the recent weather.

And I was only half kidding when I told the class that it was also alright to keep all the lights on in their homes as this means more energy is required and that my firm then gets an opportunity to compete to build power plants which would, in turn, allow me to keep my son in the plethora of Lego and Nerf Guns that he has grown accustomed to!

As I have made many speeches or presentations over the years, I like to think that I know my audience and therefore adjust the material to make it pertinent to them.

I had spent a bunch of time on various websites in search of material for explaining complex topics like nuclear energy to children and these were somewhat helpful.

However, my talk was not as successful as the one I gave a month ago about government.

Part of it was that the novelty of having someone other than their teacher speak to them had started to wear off and also the complexity of the material.

But, my main problem is that I was a little too ambitious this time. If I had to do it over again, I would have narrowed the topic of my discussion to one area and explored that in some depth.

However, I still had a great time and I like to think that the students learned a little bit that afternoon.

My thanks again to Ms. Park and the entire Grade Five class for making me feel so welcome.

Stephen can be contacted at stephengsomerville@yahoo.com