

POLITICS AS USUAL: 140 or Less...

By Alison Collins-Mrakas

?Stop telling lies about me and I'll stop telling the truth about you.?

I love that line (even though it's spoken by Gordon Gekko, in Wall Street). Though it isn't really about politics, he does fit the context nicely. In fact, it neatly sums up the current state of affairs in electioneering. Substance ? even truth ? doesn't matter. It's the messaging that counts.

The medium is the message, as Marshall McLuhan famously decreed. How right he was ? and is. And how sad for all of us.

It doesn't matter if what you are saying is true. In fact, it doesn't matter if what you are saying is a bare-faced lie. By the time the electorate catches on, it is too late. The message is out there for all to see and read ad infinitum on the internet.

It's the ?if there's smoke there's fire approach? to planting a message. The folks that mastermind these things know that regardless of what damage control is done to correct a false message, there will always be a certain portion of the population that will believe the lie. And sometimes that's all it takes to lose an election ? just a small group of folks, misled.

Take for example, the ?Birthers? in the US. These are a large group of folks where were/are hysterically insistent that Barack Obama was not in fact born in the United States. This belief became so huge that it started a ?movement?. The President of the United States was forced to produce his actual birth certificate to the public in order to quell the tinfoil- hat wearing folks who refused to believe he was American. Even with the birth certificate, even with the doctors and the nurses at the hospital in Hawaii swearing to the legitimacy of it ? there are folks out there that remain convinced that he is not, in fact an American. It would be funny, if it weren't so darn scary.

That's why we are fast moving to packaged politicians. Where absolutely everything is scripted ? from the clothes, to the language, to the placement of children in family photos. All done to convey a message, without saying a single word.

Sometimes, the image masters get it wrong with varying degrees of fallout. Dukakis in that hair net pretty much sank his bid for presidency. Romney's story about tying the dog to the roof rack of the station wagon didn't help him either. Even recently at the Calgary Stampede ? the images of Justin Trudeau and his little boy both wearing white cowboy hats shaking hands with Harper and his child both wearing black hats.

That photo - white hats versus black hats ? was picked up and run multiple times in multiple media. Not good imaging for Mr. Harper.

The fact that it matters at all though is pretty pathetic. The fact that anyone would draw a conclusion on relative abilities to govern based on what type of hat someone is wearing is frankly depressing.

Image, tight sound bites, politics in 140 characters or less ? this is what passes for political commentary now. The prevalence and prominence of social media is overwhelming. Twitter is now so ?important? that the language police in Quebec are chastising a cabinet minister for not tweeting enough in the other official language. Seriously.

I didn't even know that Cabinet Ministers tweeted anything, let alone that folks would get their knickers in a twist because it wasn't ?French? enough. For Pete's sake! Have people nothing better to do than count how many times a member of our government tweets in French?

Apparently not.

Perhaps I am longing for a day that never existed or never will.

I just wish and hope that when I open the paper and read about what is happening in Ottawa and Queen's Park that I will read something of substance. Is there a plan to deal with our aging population? Is there a plan to address the sizeable population that has no pension? Will Canada still have its pristine waters and beautiful forests when my nieces and nephews have children of their own?

I wish I would see a display of ?character? that isn't 140 or less.

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