

POLITICS AS USUAL: A cast of thousands

By Alison Collins-Mrakas

In a now months-long race to find a new leader of the Conservative Party of Canada, a Cecil B de Mille-like cast of thousands still clutter the field of candidates, with a new one, Kevin O'Leary, joining the group just a few weeks ago.

That wasn't a surprise, really. He teased about it for months on end, not unlike Trump did in the 2012 presidential race. And yes, I am aware of the comparisons made between Trump and O'Leary. Both reality stars, both very rich men, both known for their brash - to put it politely - style of speaking.

Personally, I think that's where the comparisons end. I don't see any of the same deliberate divisiveness that punctuates Trumpian discourse in O'Leary's public ponderings, all alliteration aside. I do see it in at least one other Conservative leadership candidate, mind you; the nasty politics of division that some think they can ride to victory.

This is Canada, and I don't think that kind of politics works here, not to the extent it has worked in the States. I could be wrong. I certainly hope I am not.

But, back to my point ? the field of candidates for the Conservative leadership stands at 14 right now. And this after months of hard sloggling. Eating endless rubber chicken dinners. Attending meetings great and small, trawling for memberships in riding associations across our enormous nation. Every vote counts. And every dollar spent to get those votes counts doubly so.

Which brings me to the question of why? Why are there still so many candidates in the race for the top seat in the party? Given that most of the candidates are polling in the low to negative numbers, one has to wonder just why they continue on. Is it ego? Delusion? Or is it something else?

There's one thing in having a never-say-die attitude, to continue to work hard for that goal no matter what. That's noble, no doubt, but to continue on in the face of clear evidence that you're going to lose, you have to ask yourself, why are you doing it?

I think there are some who are true-believers: they believe that the party should follow a certain path and that they have the ideas, the policies or platforms that will lead the way. They truly believe that if given the chance they are the best man or woman for the job. Numbers be damned.

I think there are some that know they don't have a chance but also know that they have enough followers behind them that they can affect who will be, ultimately, the leaders.

These are the king (or queen) makers. These are the folks that leverage their own power to ensure that the leader of the party is one that they can get behind.

And finally, there is the last group, these are the spoilers: the folks that stay in the race just to wreak havoc. I have not seen it in this particular race ? I don't think there are any candidates in it just to cause trouble ? but I have seen it in many other races, for every level of office; the candidate that knows he or she is not going to win but is hell bent on making sure that they stop others from winning, and burning down the house to boot.

Usually the spoilers have some sort of personal grudge against a particular candidate, or perhaps the party itself, feeling hard done by or disrespected in the nomination race. But, as with anything driven by spite, spoilers do some damage, but most often, only to themselves.

So, there you have it: a cluttered field and a confounding race. It will eventually get winnowed down to a handful of candidates. Anything can happen until then?