

## POLITICS AS USUAL: Here we go again

By Alison Collins-Mrakas

Sweet Georgia Brown.

I have said it before, but what in tarnation is happening to our neighbours to the south? A tell-all book by a former FBI director that speaks to the size of a President's hands (with rude innuendo intended), his fake tan, his odd hair? I mean, really? Requisite rounds of various TV 'news' shows where the author sits there with a pained expression on his face while he 'regretfully' relays all the sordid tidbits.

This, of course, gets under the wafer-thin skin of said sitting President. Thus, a Twitter war has been waging for the past few days where the duelling insults are so juvenile they'd make a five year old roll his eyes. I think the whole thing is sad and pathetic.

And here in Ontario? Less dramatic for sure, but we're not much better. With the provincial election in the offing, the 'official' attack ads started in full force this week and, from what I have seen, it's all pretty personal. Allegations of this, that and the other. Yes, some policy critiques thrown in for good measure. But the bulk of it is just character assassination. It's ugly.

And I wish it would stop. Just stop, already. Please. The personal attacks on public office holders has just got to stop. Yes. Even the attacks against Trump. Enough already. Your political opponent does not secretly have cloven hooves for feet, so stop portraying him as the devil! It is bringing the level of discourse down so low that I am concerned it will never recover.

Look at the sorry state we're in today. Nasty tweets, doctored tapes, photoshopped photos, and withering social media posts blathering on and on, repeating unfounded, unsubstantiated allegations to an ever-widening group. Third-hand stories are passed around as if they're fact, when they're nothing of the sort. At the end no one knows what's true or false, and the vitriol and venom is so awful that good people shrink back from engaging anymore.

Who will step forward to lead their communities, when it means that they will as a consequence subject themselves and their families to absolutely vicious attacks against which they have little defence? Who in their right mind would subject themselves to that?

Before I get the virtual eyeroll here, I am not advocating a kumbaya approach. This is still politics. And attacks 'legitimate attacks' are part of the game. Attack their policies? Sure. Attack their hypocrisies? Sure. But their personal appearance? Peddle salacious nonsense that's nothing more than gossip at best? Drive by smears based on gross distortions of comments dredged up from decades old social media posts? No! For the love of God, no! It has nothing to do with the job at hand, so stop muddying the waters with slimy pig slop. You are debasing yourself and everyone who reads the drek.

This is one of my last columns, so I am going to repeat myself (because I have said much of this before), to all those engaged in covering the democratic process - please engage responsibly.

The members of the fourth estate in particular, the real journalists out there, you have a job to do. And that job is to report accurately on the news. Actual news. Not compete with Access Hollywood for the latest gossip on who is sleeping with whom, allegedly. Unless the hotel room is paid for with my tax dollars, I don't care. It's not news.

I want to know about findings, not allegations. I want to know about policy, not promises. I want to know where people stand, not with whom they've laid down.

I don't know when real journalists morphed into second class paparazzi but it's not too late to turn the ship around and get back on course. Get back to work please. The state of democracy depends on it.

So endeth the rant.