

# POLITICS AS USUAL: Political Theatre

By Alison Collins-Mrakas

I don't know who said it, but someone once said a campaign is no time to discuss policy ? or words to that effect. Our dear candidates seem to be taking those words to heart as I see little of any real substance on the campaign trail; well none that seems to hit the media's attention.

What I have been seeing is wall-to-wall coverage of the Duffy trial.

I am not an apologist for Harper and, yes, clearly potential shenanigans in the PMO are definitely newsworthy, but the trial is not the only thing only thing let alone the most important thing that should be discussed in the context of the federal election campaign.

It has reached the point of ridiculousness. CBC coverage earlier this week was dominated by a discussion about whether or not a staff had read an email. Yes, I recognize that it is significant in the strictest sense whether and which staff in the PMO knew what and when. But do we not have more important, more serious things we wish to see discussed? Do we not want to know how the current crop of would-be Prime Ministers will handle crises?

The markets are in free fall, the forests are ablaze throughout much of British Columbia, air quality readings in Vancouver are similar to those in Beijing! Oil prices are bottoming out, health care costs are sky-rocketing, our population is aging and yet Statistics Canada reports as many as 6 in 10 Canadians do not have a formal pension plan.

Shall I go on?

I haven't even touched on energy issues, environmental issues, and education issues.

Yet, what are the talking points on the campaign trail? Who paid someone's bill ? with their own money no less ? and who knew about it. Did the PMO lie about knowing who really paid Duffy's bill I think that, after near continuous round the clock coverage of the matter, it is safe to say that many folks are beyond caring.

If an incredibly unscientific survey of a few friends is any indication, the general sentiment on the ?scandal? seems to be since Duffy's bills weren't paid with taxpayer money, ?what's the scandal?? I'm not sure I'd agree with that sentiment entirely, but I do see why folks are leaning that way.

The mad scramble in the PMO to squelch the controversy surrounding Duffy's bills are unseemly, to put it mildly. And the Keystone Kops-like approach to issues management in the PMO may be titillating, but as cover-ups go, it certainly doesn't reach Nixon-like levels.

There's no 18 minutes of missing tape. No Deep Throat. No Fawn Hall shredding paper like mad.

Again, I am not saying it's nothing, but I am saying it's not the only thing. We need our leaders and leaders-to-be to talk about real issues facing real people, right now. Please stop talking about people's hair. I don't care, and I'm sure you don't either.

I understand that all politics is theatre, and a show trial definitely makes for good theatre, but it should not be theatre of the absurd.

It may be the silly season, but I don't think anyone's laughing anymore.

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