

POLITICS AS USUAL: Rodents of Unusual Size

By Alison Collins-Mrakas

Many people enter the political realm only to exit it a short while later disgusted by what they see, experience or worse, by what they endure.

Hopes for 'making a difference' or 'positive change' are inevitably replaced by feelings of despair and desolation at the reality of how the political world actually works. Much like the practice of law isn't like Boston Legal, and police work isn't like Law and Order, the practice of politics is not like the West Wing. Certainly there are elements of it that are familiar, but the day to day 'work' of politics is nothing like what one would expect. It's not what's 'seen on TV.'

Personally, I found the decision-making process to be the most frustrating. Either it proceeded at positively glacial speed with multiple reports and meetings to decide (or not) on one item or, when a decision actually was made, it was often based more on emotion than on any discernible facts that I could see.

In my humble opinion, much of what passes as governance is based almost entirely on agenda-driven as opposed to evidence-based decision making.

Affecting real and positive change 'at any level of government' can be difficult. And for those that got into it for precisely that reason, the reality can be very disheartening.

The only part of politics that is like what's portrayed on TV? It's the nastiness. Regardless of the office sought 'Councillor to MP' all candidates will likely face at least one Rodent of Unusual Size: that particular breed of vermin that seeks to gnaw away at candidates until they give up, bloodied and defeated.

We all say that we want honest, hard working people to represent our best interests in Ottawa, at Queen's Park and at the council table. So why then, when they do put their names forward either for a first time or as a veteran seeking to serve again, do we sit back like Romans in the coliseum and watch as they are fed to the Lions?

I think a large part of it is apathy. Many don't care enough about the process itself, let alone those that are engaged in it. So it's not surprising that we make barely a whisper when folks are torn to shreds before our very eyes.

There's also the sense that 'this is just how things are'. 'Politics is a nasty business' or a 'blood sport'. The good ones that happen to get spat out in the process are just collateral damage. They are seen as not tough enough to do the job anyway.

But, who says that one has to be as tough as a gladiator just to seek public office? Great warriors don't make great legislators. If they did, then every country would be run by a military junta.

Many a good man or woman has been beaten down by the process. I can think of quite a few and from every political party. Joe Clark. Kim Campbell. Stephane Dion. Ed Broadbent. Unfairly or not, just some names that come to mind when I think of those that were chewed up by the machine.

They are the Tall Poppies, the folks with something real to offer that are cut down just because of it.

Over the next 12 months or so, we are going to be faced with a barrage of messaging about candidates for both local office (Municipal election in October 2014) and Federal office (federal election in October 2015). At the risk of sounding like Pollyanna, I hope that we can all put down our scythes for a moment, and let the Tall Poppies grow.

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