

POLITICS AS USUAL: Those are the facts, Jack!

By Alison Collins Mrakas

I know that primary school is a distant memory for many, many folks but the lessons learned in kindergarten should serve one well throughout one's life.

They are foundational. Fundamental. Basic things like how to tie a shoelace, how to share your toys, understanding right and wrong, truth and lies. These are the types of lessons that are taught at a very young age and reinforced throughout one's life ? in school, at home, in places of worship and interactions with other people.

A general set of precepts that civilized society understands and adheres to.

Well, let me rephrase that: precepts that society generally ? or ideally? ? adheres to.

As we are seeing right now, unfortunately, I fear that the lessons learned at age 5 have faded from our collective memories. How else to explain the current state of affairs where up is down, black is white and a fact may be a fact only if it's not an alternate fact? When some folks feel no compunction at all to tell the truth and get darn right ornery when presented with facts that don't serve their version of reality?

I can't believe I have to say this, but there are facts folks. Things that are true. And there are things that are not true. That is reality. Again, this is something we learn when we are very young; that there are facts ? generally accepted to be the truth ? and there is fiction, which is generally accepted as being not the truth.

To simplify it even further, we're taught that when something is demonstrably true ? say, that the sky is blue (and please don't give me a lecture on light refraction?). That is a fact.

And when something that is demonstrably false, say that chickens have eight legs, that is not true.

So far so good.

I think everyone can agree at least conceptually that there are certain things - called facts - that are true. And that there are certain things that are not true.

But what do you call things that are not true?

Here's where it gets tricky for some folks. If something isn't true, that means it isn't a fact. So, what do you call it? I guess it depends on who you are, where you are and what you are trying to say ? or not say. They could be falsehoods or misstatements, misapprehensions or my favourite ? ?misspoke.?

What's missing from that list? How about lies? Because for the most part, the purveyors of these ?misstatements?, these ?false statements? are in fact flat out lying.

A five year old can see it, for heaven's sake.

So, why are folks so afraid to say it?

Yes, the word ?lie? is a fraught term. It implies intent. That you are knowingly saying something that isn't true. So, using that term seems to cause conniptions amongst the punditry.

I have no idea why. When someone says something that is clearly, demonstrably false, such that any reasonable person would know as much, then making such a statement is not misstating a fact, it is not ?mis-speaking,? it is not even stating an alternate opinion. It is lying. Period.

The fact that we are even having a debate about what to call a lie is, quite simply, astounding to me

But, we're now in a universe designed by Kafka. Where we have facts and ?alternate? facts, not truth and lies. And lest you think this is all about Trump and his appalling talking heads who have parked their principles and common sense at the front door of their new offices, it is not.

This penchant for stretching, exaggerating, misstating and out-and-out lying pervades public discourse at virtually every level, from national to local. Trump's team just does it on a grander scale.

Personally, I think we're teetering on the edge of a cliff. Actually we're hanging onto the edge of that cliff by our fingernails.

We're about to fall into the abyss of lies, where no one will believe anything a party leader says. Or worse, they'll believe everything their chosen party leader says regardless of what it is they're saying and believe that everything anyone else says is a lie.

We need to pull back from that cliff. Or suffer the consequences.