

POLITICS AS USUAL: Where's the beef?

By Alison Collins-Mrakas

Do you remember those Wendy's commercials where the little old lady is handed a burger and looking at the puny little meat patty sandwiched between the huge bun says with disdain, "Where's the beef?" That line became a well-used catchphrase to say, where's the meat? Where's the substance of an idea or a plan when one is presented with some cockamamie scheme?

Recently, I had to strongly resist the urge to scream that out when I attended an information session on yet another new "initiative" being rolled out that was going to "protect" our environment.

The science, the evidence, the facts upon which this new initiative is based was sorely lacking but that didn't seem to matter to the folks in the room. They were too enamoured with this self-proclaimed "innovative" idea to bother questioning the facts or lack thereof.

Fact based decision making should be the norm, but I would settle for at least evidence based policy making. You know, developing new policies based on facts, not wishful thinking? Not based on what the latest enviro, financial, or educational guru has to say. Time and time again, these gurus have been shown to be little more than snake oil salesmen. And yet the powers that be continue to be sucked in.

It isn't just one level of government or one party that is especially prone to these kinds of logic defying decisions. Politicians of all stripes fall victim to the "shiny toy" syndrome. Everyone wants to be the leader - the greenest municipality, the best energy innovator, the government that "saved" education. But being new, being first isn't the being the best, and the rush to be so often leads to rather ill-advised hasty decision making.

It's a case of "haste makes waste" just as our mothers warned us, but they are wasting our time and our money on these half-baked ideas.

The two policy areas where you see the worst of this woeful lack of even common sense? Education and environment. It seems that every time we turn around we are subjected to yet another crackpot theory on how to educate our children or "protect" our environment.

What we get instead are kids that can't do basic arithmetic in their heads and wind power that's little more than huffs and puffs. What's worse is that many of those decision makers know that's all a bunch of hooley! Rather than look like they are behind the times, rather than risk looking like an uninformed rube, folks around the table - be it a Council table, the caucus table or a boardroom table - say nothing.

They nod their heads in agreement, solemnly intoning their acquiescence to what is clearly insanity.

The Emperor has no clothes and yet they take turns describing the colour of his coat.

What's lost on them all is that innovation - true innovation - is based on clear, reasoned thinking. It requires a careful examination of all the facts in evidence and often it is a recognition that sometimes the best solution, the best decision isn't based on new technology or the new idea, but rather the simplest, least complicated one.

So, to our dear leaders I say, when next you are struggling with a "big decision", think horses not zebras?