

BROCK'S BANTER: Above the footsteps of giants

By Brock Weir

It is sometimes said our leaders lack perspective, whether it is looking at the elusive, oft-mentioned ? and usually undefined ? ?big picture? or having a full grasp of Canada's (or Ontario's, or insert the jurisdiction of your choice) place in the world.

Well, as far as our next Governor General is concerned, we can throw those ideas out the window.

I think the Queen would be hard-pressed to find someone in the country with a wider-ranging perspective of the world, as well as the issues within it, than the newly-minted Governor General-Designate Julie Payette, the former Chief Astronaut of the Canadian Space Agency.

A systems engineer by trade, she brings an impressive résumé to Rideau Hall, ranging from a long-time position at IBM to Board positions at organization as varied as Queen's University, Drug Free Kids Canada, the International Olympic Committee Women in Sports Commission, and the Montreal Bach Festival. There are few people who can say this is not a well-rounded portfolio!

Ms. Payette's appointment as Governor General-Designate was announced by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau in Ottawa last week, following a meeting with the Queen in Edinburgh.

?She is already well-known to Canadians,? said Trudeau, noting her achievement of being the second Canadian woman in space following Roberta Bondar. ?Ms. Payette's life has been one dedicated to discovery, to dreaming big, to always staying focused on the things that matter most. These truly Canadian traits, along with her years of public service, make her unquestionably qualified for the office.?

Remarkably, Ms. Payette's appointment is finally something on which Mr. Trudeau and Andrew Scheer have found some common ground, with the Leader of the Opposition stating that her background makes her ?well-suited to play a leadership role in Canada as the next Governor-General.?

?As the representative of the Crown in Canada, the Governor-General's role is to perform the Queen's duties as laid out by the constitution on her behalf,? he said. ?It is a critical non-partisan role that can have a direct effect on the stability of Canada's government.?

Mr. Scheer is quite correct that the Governor General is a critical position but its non-partisan role is, in my opinion, one of its greatest selling points.

As a Canadian, I have personally been an advocate for our current form of government where we have a strictly non-partisan head of state, a role, of course, currently fulfilled by the Queen, and represented here by the Governor General.

While I have always felt this to be the case, these feelings have never been so strong as they are now where, in certain parts of the world, heads of state elected with a political mandate behind them have proven particularly problematic not only on the world stage, but blurring the ideal separation between Head of State and Head of Government. As such, it is difficult to say such a position is able to represent the entirety of a nation.

Since Adrienne Clarkson was appointed to represent the Queen back in 1999, Canada has been fortunate to have had three successive, dynamic Governors General who have left a lasting imprint on the venerable office, each shaping and further defining the role for their successor.

Ms. Clarkson admirably achieved something that was once thought next to impossible, revitalizing the office itself and making it accessible and relevant to Canadians.

This was a tradition more than ably carried on by Michaëlle Jean, who built upon this, reaching more Canadians than ever before, forged new ties with Canada's military and military families, and handled a constitutional crisis which allowed her to flex some of the more atrophied muscles of the office.

Under the term of the incumbent, David Johnston, along with his wife Dr. Sharon Johnston, we have been well-served by an impressive double act which has not only carried on the legacies of his two predecessors but breathed new life into the ancient constitutional roots that define the Governor Generalship.

As was so ably demonstrated by Chris Hadfield's most recent journey into space, astronauts have almost an unparalleled ability to capture the imagination of Canadians, especially young Canadians, and I expect Ms. Payette to be no exception.

Backed by her own remarkable accomplishments, along with nearly half a millennia of history behind her, I greatly look forward to seeing the stamp she will leave on Rideau Hall, and Canada as a whole.

?I must express my sincere appreciation to Her Majesty the Queen and to the Prime Minister for the confidence they have shown me, but more importantly for the chance, an amazing chance, a second chance to serve Canada again,? said Ms. Payette in her first

speech as Governor General-designate. ?Seen from outer space, Canada is immense, made of mountains, lakes, forests, of breathtaking beauty, in spite of the fact there are 10 provinces, three territories, many regions and municipalities, the fact remains we see no borders from space. Rather, we see 1,001 details, small and big differences in terms of languages and culture that make Canada so rich, a grand and luscious land, glorious and free.

?Just like space travel, we don't do things necessarily because they are easy, but because they are hard and indeed the task will be hard because it requires to follow in the footsteps of giants.?