

BROCK'S BANTER: Back to Back (and Back Again)

By Brock Weir

September is here and, as parents know, there are just a few more boxes to cross out on your calendar before your rug rats are out of your hair and cracking the books once again.

Many of you who have children probably subscribe to the feeling doled out in old Staples (and, earlier, Business Depot) commercials showing parents frolicking down the aisles of the store with more glee than Gene Kelly hanging off a lamppost in the rain while their downcast children trudge along a few steps behind. Others might be on a completely different track, luxuriating in the last few days you have with your kids before the school bell rings and the realities of work after a last minute vacation sets in. Whichever side of the fence you're on, it's a familiar routine. We all know it is coming and there is nothing we can do to stop it. School might be back but there are few of us who can escape the fact September means ?Back to Reality? for those of us who aren't wrangling little ones.

If one is in politics, it's time to catching up on the mental and oral gymnastics you've been neglecting in time for the wheels of politics to fire up.

As Stephen Somerville discusses in his Front Porch Perspective column this week, however, many of our friends in Toronto have had to gear up a little bit earlier than normal to account for the Toronto Bi-Election that will, of course, be a test on how Kathleen Wynne's Liberal Government might be faring in the eyes of the general electorate. It will also be a test on whether the electorate is subscribing to the more accessible brand of Progressive Conservativism their new leader, Patrick Brown, has been taking across the province.

Back in July, Mr. Brown brought his campaign-that-is-not-a-campaign to Aurora and I had a chance to sit down with him at Town Park to quiz him on issues near and dear to our readers.

At the time, I thought ? and wrote ? that his candour was a refreshing change of pace compared to the current American election cycle.

?I think we were too narrow-cast,? he said. ?I think that's the reason we're in a better light today: we are building a more modern, inclusive PC party. I don't care who you love, where you're born, the colour of your skin, how much money you have, if you belong to a union or not, you have a home in our party. People want to be fiscally responsible. They want an honest, transparent government. They don't want something rabid and ideological.?

It sounded great at the time, but it seems somewhere between July and today, the plot has become lost along the way.

Last week, the Progressive Conservative leader offered his own back-to-school special for parents, vowing to scrap changes the Liberal government made last year to the Province's health curriculum.

?I believe parents are the primary educators of their children,? he wrote. ?When it comes to sexual health education, parents should have a say on how much their children are taught and at what age.?

Branding the Government's changes as ?controversial?, these changes, in my experience talking to local voters, are among the least ?controversial? things that can be attributed to the Wynne government during its mandate.

Last year, the changes prompted about 20 residents from Newmarket and Aurora to briefly picket the offices of Newmarket-Aurora MPP Chris Ballard. They shared the sentiment that parents should be the primary educators of their children. In fact, it is a sentiment I think everyone can agree with. As a reporter, however, the detail I found hard to pin down among the group was precisely what they were objecting too.

Some argued the first primary grades are too young to learn the anatomically correct names for their genitals and other body parts, while others argued the upper primary grades were too young to be taught the concept of consent ? an offering I found particularly alarming in this day and age.

While Mr. Brown says he's offering a party that doesn't care who you love, by backtracking on this for a brief window before he apologized for the latter issued under his name, he was pandering to a group in the base that very much cares and the PC wagon was careening down a hill back to the ?rabid and ideological? grounds so many find unpalatable.

Nevertheless, the issue is now out in the open and the gate has yet to be closed.

Parents should be the primary educators of their children, but when we're honest with ourselves, how many parents can honestly say they will be 100 per cent comfortable sitting their kids down and giving them all the information they know in their heart of hearts their kids need to be properly equipped to navigate this heady world? How many of you learned everything you needed to know from your parents? No matter how ?liberal? and free your parents might have been, I don't anticipate seeing a sea of hands being

raised.

How many of you wish you knew a little bit more before being confronted with any variety of situation? I think that might garner a few more hands.

If this becomes a PC policy plank in future bi-elections in the lead up to the Fall 2018 election, and they ultimately take all the marbles, it might be up to the kids entering Grade One next week and those getting off the bus for the first time a year from now to fill in the blanks for those coming up.