

BROCK'S BANTER: Beyond the frontlines

By Brock Weir

There are some weeks
when the stress simply gets the better of me.

I have to admit, now
and then I can be a little bit snappish, although that is rarely my intention.

We all have days when
our respective wells of patience start to run a little bit dry and, quite
often, a drought will ensue until there's a good night's sleep to be had.

I was very much in
this boat last week; so much so that I began to think how much my own life
could be simplified by answering just about any question I got with a question
of my own: ?What's the answer you're looking for??

It seemed like an
efficient way to cut the bull and get straight to the point because, as we all
know, sometimes we're asked questions that aren't really questions; that is,
someone who has an answer in mind comes to you looking for assurances.

If you're not on the
same page right at the outset, you can find yourself in an endless loop of
brainstorming only to arrive back at your respective starting points.

It seems more and
more these days people are looking for answers they either already know or
seeking out the answers they are hoping to hear, ones that will satisfy
preconceived notions in their head that are there just for the hell of it.

Maybe you've
experienced this while out shopping with your spouse or partner.

If you have any
amount of living under your belt, you know the answer to the time-honoured
question, ?Does this make me look fat?? is an immediate and unhesitating ?No.?

?Do you like my new
hairdo?? Well, if you say no, what good will that do? The deed is done.

?Wasn't this tattoo a
great idea?? Well, if that's the kind of tattoo you wanted, you sure picked a
good one.

Where things get a
bit of dicey, however, is when this creeps into our politics.

This concept of setting out to prove a hypothesis and ignoring facts that might pose a problem to said hypothesis has been front of mind recently when considering moves made by governments at home and abroad.

In Ottawa, we still have lingering questions over the SNC-Lavalin affair, for instance, which has been counterintuitive to basic common sense.

At Queen's Park and MPPs offices across the Province, we have a seemingly endless loop of demonstrations from people who believe they have been ? or will be ? adversely effected by the Government's decisions; not to mention a government providing answers to questions that haven't even been asked ? like Buck-a-Beer, tailgating and snappy new licence plates.

South of the Border ? well, there isn't enough column space to get into that, but if you have any connection to the outside world you should have no trouble filling in the blanks.

For the sake of brevity, let's stick to matters close to home.

Over the past few weeks, I have been thinking about the second event at which I covered Premier Ford.

The first took place a few months before he became leader of Ontario's Progressive Conservatives when he threw his support behind an area resident seeking a PC nomination.

This second instance took place after he had thrown his hat in the ring to replace Patrick Brown.

It was the final heat of a hotly contested leadership race and he set out his vision for the Province.

?You look at our healthcare system [and it is] absolutely broken,? the then-candidate Ford told the packed crowd of supporters. ?We have the greatest doctors in the entire world right here in Ontario. We have the greatest nurses right here in Ontario and the greatest healthcare givers, the frontline workers here, but they are frustrated? and I believe in letting the doctors tell us how they can find efficiencies.?

Mr. Ford went on to outline his plan for reducing wait times in hospitals, getting more nurses to

take over from EMS, thereby allowing them to get back out on the road, and give doctors incentives to go into outlying areas of the province, particularly the north.

?Until you talk to these people, you don't realise how desperate they are for healthcare,? he continued, referring to a large swath of residents near Peterborough he said did not have a GP. ?Whatever it takes to get doctors up there, reducing their taxes, putting in a little medical building or where people need the help ? nothing is more important for our health. If we don't have our health, we're done. We shouldn't be in that position in the greatest province in the country. Help is on the way, resources are on its way, and most importantly we are going to listen to the people.?

When it comes to some facets of the complex health care system, they have indeed listened to the people. But, in many other cases both falling under and outside the healthcare umbrella, the same can't be said.

One needs to only look as far as the fierce reaction from parents and assistance providers when changes to autism care were proposed. Needless to say, the same can be said about the equally passionate reactions from teachers and students regarding cuts and changes to the education system.

These care providers and teachers are, in the context framed by the Premier, the frontline workers in these cases and yet the very real concerns of these frontline workers are either being ignored or, in the case of teachers, dismissed out of hand or even mocked by those in positions of power.

And what of students? They are the direct beneficiaries of these frontline workers much in the way patients are directly impacted by the frontline workers of doctors and nurses. Still, their concerns appear to be quickly set aside or reframed as the callow folly of youth.

And this is a shame.

But I found some degree of optimism last week attending an event with Deputy Premier Christine Elliott, who told a group of business professionals concerned with a dearth of students pursuing skilled trades across the province, that consultations are continuing.

?You need to sit down and discuss all the issues that are important to teachers; it is salary, but there are many other issues too that perhaps have not been fully dealt with in the past,? she said. ?I think we need to sit down and talk about it and see if there's a solution that can be found.?

Let's hope so; the future, in my view, depends
on it.