

BROCK'S BANTER: Think of the children! If it's convenient

By Brock Weir

I often worry about the youth of today.

Some of you ? youth and not-so-youthful alike ? might be rolling your eyes right now, but in the interest of full disclosure, I think it should be pointed out right here and now that I am still in the first half of my thirties. So, for the naysayers, I'm old enough for my own youth to be well in the rear-view mirror, but it's not so far back as to not remember what being a youth was like.

Some, however, seem to forget more quickly than others.

And the reasons they forget at a greater speed has nothing to do with an individual feeling the march of time at a different pace, or a particularly rapid tick-tock on whatever it is they used to call a ?biological clock,? but in many instances it is usually a matter of expediency, at best, and, at worst, one of wilful ignorance.

People who knew me in elementary school and high school are another demographic reading this column potentially rolling their eyes right now. I was the proverbial ?dork? growing up, a viewpoint that people were all too eager to point out as the dorkdom was in full swing.

Growing up with a brother ten years older than myself, a brother who didn't live with us full-time until I was in my teens, a lot of my time was spent with adults and, for better or worse, I usually gravitated towards the adults in a social situation rather than hanging out with my peers.

Maybe this has given me additional perspective on the subject, or maybe I'm trying to subconsciously make up for lost time, but I think in this day and age more consideration needs to be given to the young people of today. And, yes, I feel exceedingly old just writing that.

There seems to be a disconnect with lawmakers in the upper levels of government between protecting future generations ? invariably and folksily referred to as ?our children and grandchildren? no matter what programs are being discussed ? and the purse strings they've tasked themselves with tightening.

Last fall, for instance, Ontarians were greeted by alarming reports from Queen's Park on just what the Province's fiscal situation is. From the outset, and rightly so, there were calls for spending to be reigned in and some programs be reviewed ostensibly to protect the province from going further into the red. Of course, when government brass touted this obvious necessity, it was couched in the time-tested phrase that such measures were integral in stopping ?our children and grandchildren? and future generations down the line from being saddled with the debt of today.

On its face, it is something that is hard to argue and I won't be doing that in this column space, but this sentiment doesn't quite hold water when pumping the brakes on a program or initiative to combat a spending spiral results in ?our children and grandchildren? and indeed their futures being the first demo caught in the crosshairs.

Take our education system, for instance. It is usually the case that the first programs to go are ones that are not directly related to the core subjects of math, English and science. Arts funding goes out the window, despite clear evidence that arts programs ? and ?arts? as a term is used very loosely here ? are integral not only to the development of the child, but in engaging and stimulating the minds of youth in ways more traditional textbook subjects cannot. Thus, they play a key part in broadening their respective worldviews for today's global society.

Outside of tightening the purse strings, it is hard to reconcile concern about the future ?our children and grandchildren? will be left with when one considers the proposed rollback of health and sexual education lessons in this Province. It is certainly difficult to reconcile this movement with the negative impact this will have directly on the youth who are allegedly at the forefront of this decision-making process.

Such moves, if they are indeed born to fruition, will have the ignominious honour of rolling back the clock two decades to prepare ?our children and grandchildren? for navigating a world that no longer exists for, perhaps, the trade-off of sparing the blushes of parents who would prefer to not address real-world around the dinner table when their kids get home from school.

Then, we have the thorny world of carbon ? whether you want to call it a ?carbon tax?, ?carbon pricing? or whatever term you're most comfortable using, whether you are pro or con.

This is an issue that will be on the lips of many ? if they are not already ? as the various parties jostling to form government after the Federal Election state their cases for voters.

At the start of this election cycle, the Province got into the act by reiterating its position against the Federal Carbon Tax stating they were ?standing up for families and businesses.?

?Ontario's Government for the People is standing up for families and businesses that will be hurt by the combined impact of the federal government's job-killing carbon tax and Canada Pension Plan enhancement, both of which come into force today.? said the Government in a press release on New Year's Day.

There is little in the release, however, to indicate just how opposing such measures is standing up for families. Businesses, yes, but families, decidedly no.

A few weeks previous to the January 1 statement, the Province said it would be releasing its plan to reduce industrial greenhouse gas emissions for public comment beginning this month, a plan, they said, that would ?regulate industry without imposing the Federal government's carbon tax, which threatens Ontario jobs and the ability of our industries to compete internationally.?

While the Made-in-Ontario approach that the Government is offering positively identifies climate change as a reality, I hope in time that a more concrete action plan is submitted for public approval. The plan, as it stands now, outlines some actions that are on the table, as well as a pathway to future actions, but a significant portion of the document pertains to how Ontarians can adapt for the reality of climate change rather than what the government is planning to do to be proactive.

The idea that a carbon tax might have an adverse effect on families today might indeed hold water, but thoughts should be spared for the families of tomorrow.

In the interests of safe-guarding ?our children and grandchildren? down the line and truly prioritizing their future rather than our present, perhaps there's money in the budget that can be earmarked for a set of adjustable water wings for every Ontario newborn to protect against what seems to be a climate change inevitability thanks to inaction.

Maybe, just maybe, it is more practical to come up with concrete solutions.