

## Candidates need to look at stance on free speech: Reader

The Air ORNGE and Lottery Corporation fiascos, the billion dollar power plant debacle, apathetic energy ministers who refused to become more engaged in proactively addressing our local power supply and public consultation concerns, missing e-mails, missing accountability, skyrocketing deficits and debt, increased taxes and user fees, our declining economic base and years of broken promises are enough to make most voters pause before casting their vote in the upcoming provincial election.

But, it is the clear and present danger to political free speech that has me most troubled.

On the one hand, the Provincial Liberals are trying to pass Bill 83, 'The Protection of Public Participation Act, 2014' and on the other hand it appears to me that at least some members of our local Liberal Association Executive have either participated in, or supported the very same type of legal action that Bill 83 is trying to address; including one case that was referenced in a 2010 Anti-SLAPP Report that was used by the Attorney General in order to justify the need for a law designed to protect people from strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs).

More recently, the Premier has decided to use her party's resources in order to sue the leader of the loyal opposition following his political comments concerning matters of public importance. Would it not be ironic if the Premier was held accountable to her own proposed legislation designed to protect political free speech?

I think that it is worth noting that Aurora's Code of Conduct states that public office is not to be used for personal gain and more importantly the Charter of Rights prohibits governments from being able to sue for defamation.

Any attempt to publicly fund a private third party defamation lawsuit that is fronted by an elected representative strikes me as a rather transparent attempt to achieve the same end result by legally circumventing the spirit and intent of the Charter of Rights in its efforts to protect political free speech.

Politics can be emotional, heated, charged and sometimes even misguided or mistaken, but if a politician can't handle the tough language and accountability that comes with the territory, then in my view they should find another line of work.

I am inclined to agree with the Canadian Civil Liberties Association in their stance that democracy depends on our collective defence of a wide tolerance for political free speech and SLAPP litigation poses a serious threat to our basic and fundamentally important civil rights.

The Liberals can't have it both ways no matter how much they may think that they hold the moral high ground.

In my humble political opinion (assuming that I'm allowed to have one) local politicians Chris Ballard, John Gallo and Wendy Gaertner have supported actions that have threatened to put a chill on political free speech and I will be making my municipal and provincial voting decisions accordingly.

Richard Johnson  
Aurora