

## FRONT PORCH PERSPECTIVE: Ms. Park's Class

Discussing Government with Ms. Park's Grade 5 Class at Devins Drive P.S.

By Stephen Somerville

My almost ten year old son Ryan is learning about government in his grade five class at Devins Drive Public School.

He had mentioned to his teacher a while back that I have been involved for a long time as a political volunteer. Ms. Park extended me an invitation to come in and discuss government with her class.

I readily accepted.

I met with Ms. Park's class during the afternoon of Tuesday November 26, and what a fun time I had.

I had an hour and twenty minutes to fill so rather than just do a question and answer session - and as I know a picture is worth a thousand words - I put together a power point presentation (augmented with two large maps of the Canadian and Ontario electoral district maps).

As I was hoping that this would be a very interactive session, I had lots of questions for the students as well.

I first started off by telling the class that I had been a political volunteer for over thirty one years ? longer than their teacher had been around!

We then discussed the size of Canada; the number of provinces and territories, and what representative government and British Parliamentary Democracy is about.

I was amazed at both their knowledge and the types of questions they asked me.

Most of the students know who the Prime Minister is, who the Premier is, and a surprising number did know who our MP (Lois Brown) and our local MPP (Frank Klees) is. And the Mayor should be happy as a bunch of students know who Geoff Dawe is.

I showed the class some slides about the 308 districts that make up Canada's electoral system, then I put up a chart that showed the number of seats that the individual parties currently hold and in what province.

We had a good discussion regarding these figures and where the geographic strengths lie of the respective federal political parties.

Then we discussed the provincial legislature and compared the situation in Ottawa ? a majority Conservative government ? with what is happening at Queen's Park ? a minority government headed by the Liberals.

What was really interesting for me was coming up with a good way to describe ?Left Wing? from ?Right Wing? and the concept of the political spectrum.

I found a good chart on the web produced by staff at Markville Secondary School and scrubbed it to make it more effective for the class to understand and then made a small diagram showing where the political parties sit - in ideological terms - along the political spectrum.

The children were very fascinated when I told them how many adults don't vote in Federal, Provincial and Municipal elections and they could not believe it when I said that over 62% of eligible voters did not vote in the last Aurora municipal election.

We also talked about the Parti Quebecois and their raison d'être, among a great many other topics.

The class seemed to get a real kick out of my final slides on energy. I was explaining to them that because I develop power projects across the country that I deal with governments at all levels.

We discussed the different types of energy generation and how it goes from the power station across the transmission lines and then to the distribution lines before the electrons finally get into their homes or school.

The class got a charge out of the small scale General Electric wind turbine model that I brought in. This turbine contained a small cow figure which helped to put the immense size of the real wind turbine (over 300 feet high) in perspective for the children.

The final message that I left the twenty odd students with was this: ?If you only remember one thing that we have discussed from the last hour and twenty minutes, it is that when you are 18 years old, and eligible to vote, that you do so ? for whichever political party you choose.?

At the end of our session the students were kind enough to present me with a large handmade Thank You card that was signed by all of them.

My thanks to Ms. Park and the entire Grade Five class for making me feel so welcome.

The last word goes to my son.

At the end of our group discussion, Ryan came up to me, gave me a hug in the middle of the classroom and said ?that was a lot better than I thought it was going to be?.

A nice ending to a wonderful afternoon!

Stephen can be contacted at [stephengsomerville@yahoo.com](mailto:stephengsomerville@yahoo.com)