

## POLITICS AS USUAL:

By Alison Collins-Mrakas

While this column will be published after Thanksgiving, I would still like to give thanks, albeit belatedly.

I am thankful for all the election signs that are littering our communities at present. Yes. You read that right. Is their omnipresence annoying? You betcha, but I will take that annoyance any day over the alternative. You can have someone tell you who will be your leader or you can choose for yourself. Now which option sounds better to you?

Lawn signs, election signs, campaign ads ? these are all demonstrations of a free and open democratic society. We are allowed to proclaim to all and sundry who we prefer as mayor or councillor. Our families will not disappear in the middle of the night simply because we put a sign on our lawn saying we support candidate X. So yes, I am thankful for those god-awful signs because it means that I have a say, I can choose who governs my municipality.

I am thankful for the clearly partisan letters to the editor that sprout like mushrooms in the midst of elections. It is virtually the same every election period. The usual suspects (or suspect as the case may be) writes in, week after week, in the lead up to voting day, spouting off about why candidate X is terrible and blah blah blah. The letters make us shake our head and think, ?goodness, let it go, will you??

On the other hand, there are often those who take a much more measured approach to offering their opinions. Some letter writers are thoughtful, insightful and offer substantive arguments about why one should or should not vote for candidate X. Those letters us make us pause and give careful consideration to the arguments being made.

Regardless, whether its whining, drivel or reasoned arguments, I am thankful for the letters because they mean we have the freedom to express our opinions about our politicians and those who seek public office. Yes, those freedoms have been under threat as of late ? through SLAPP suits and the chilling effects they can have on those who speak truth to power.

But no one is going to jail for writing a letter. No one is losing their families. No one is being tortured for daring to say I don't like candidate X and think you should vote for candidate Y instead.

So I am thankful for the letters, the ones that make me chuckle and the ones that make me think.

Finally, I am thankful for the debates and the meet and greets and all candidates meetings and all the door knocking. Yes, the debates are interminably long. Yes, they are often painful to endure, but they are so incredibly important to the process. How else can you get informed?

You have a right to know who is running for office in your municipality. You have a right to have as much interaction as possible with those folks so you know who you are voting for and have confidence in that choice.

You can't get that from reading pamphlets and websites. Glossy ads and fancy brochures are pretty packaging. It's what's inside that counts. Without speaking with a candidate or at least hearing him or her speak, you could be voting for a cipher instead of a living, breathing representative. You need to see and hear a candidate in order to make an informed choice.

So, in the end, despite all the irritations that come along with an election period, I am truly thankful for my right to vote. I hope you are too. Election Day is October 27. Get out and vote. I know I will.

Until next week, stay informed stay involved because this is, after all, Our Town.