

POLITICS AS USUAL: A Force for Change

By Alison Collins-Mrakas

My last column spoke of the need for politicians to be a force for positive change ? and specifically commending Aurora's Council for its recent stance on a painful chapter in Aurora's history and offering a sincere apology to those affected.

It was, and is, a positive and welcome decision by the majority of Council. Again, it is truly unfortunate that not all Councillors could see the value ? or the need? - in apologizing to the three families victimized by the fruitless, futile lawsuit. However, it is heartening to know that the majority wanted to do their part in affording all of us the opportunity to move forward.

We saw a similar stance this week from Premier Wynne who apologized unequivocally for the Ontario Liberal government's cancellation of the gas plants during the recent hard fought election.

Despite claims to the contrary, there's no question that the decision to cancel the wildly unpopular gas plants was an entirely political one given that they were sited to be located in two ridings that were up in the air, so to speak electorally. (By the way, why they were sited there in the first place is a matter that should also be examined. It isn't mere nimbyism on the part of the residents. The locations were not ideal).

Premier Wynne stated that she took ?personal responsibility? for the significant costs borne by the taxpayers of Ontario. Personal responsibility. How extraordinary.

She is being both lauded and lambasted for the apology ? a not unexpected outcome. Comments from those in the house were along the lines of ?hollow apology? and that it was all ??too late?. The chattering classes feel that an apology is not enough, while others question why an apology was offered by the Premier at all ? given that it wasn't her government or her choice to cancel the plants.

Leaving aside the other parties' calls for investigations, inquiries and a visit perhaps by Torquemada, I will say that in my personal opinion there does need to be some kind of formal review of the manner in which the plants were cancelled and the method by which the costs of the cancellations were calculated and disclosed and the disparity between figures provided before and after the election.

Quite frankly, a jump from 40 million to 310 million in costs to the taxpayers of Ontario deserves more than a mere mea culpa and ?let's move on now.? You can't preach openness, accountability and transparency and then fail to address a quarter billion dollar ?oopsie??

But an imminent inquisition notwithstanding, focusing on the apology itself, I think it was extraordinary. The naysayers and righteously indignant are missing the point entirely by characterizing it as a cravenly political act.

Call me naïve (and one reader stated as much after last week's column) but I think the apology was genuine. She recognizes that as Captain of the ship, she is responsible for all decisions made regardless of whether she made them herself or not. To quote Premier Wynne (via the Globe and Mail), she said, she felt that residents wanted a ?personal apology? ?...if there's a possibility for (residents) to have a trusting relationship with politicians? an apology was necessary.

Trust in our politicians is hard to come by these days, as I stated last week. In just the last three days alone we've had reports of a \$90,000 ?gift? to a Senator from a senior staffer in the PMO to pay back funds owed to taxpayers, bizarre allegations of a crack smoking Mayor, and a very, very late recollection of a potential bribe offered to the now leader of the Opposition.

I am sure we will have the requisite statements of regret from the parties concerned for the errors of their ways. But to paraphrase Premier Wynne, regret affords one a certain distance from taking responsibility. It's a qualified apology. It's a non-apology apology. Which makes the Premier's statement all the more extraordinary ? it is recognition that when a mistake has been made

(especially a rather colossal one) nothing short of an apology will do.

Something our Aurora Council has similarly recognized.

Happy long weekend everyone. I hope you had a relaxing unofficial start to your summer.

That's all for this week. Until next week, stay informed, stay involved, because this is, after all, Our Town.