

POLITICS AS USUAL: A Promising New Year

By Alison Collins-Mrakas

For my final column of the year, I will touch on two pieces of legislation that ? if enacted ? will have both impacts on, and significance for, Aurorans.

First, the Regional Chair position may finally be a one by, of and for the people of York Region.

The recycled motion put forward by MPP Ballard has already passed second reading and it is looking good to be enacted at some point in the New Year.

This motion ? to make the Regional Chair an elected position ? has been tried by multiple politicians multiple times. Let's hope fourth time is a charm?

The foes of the process are commenting on the fact that running an election Region-wide will be difficult, costly and thus limiting. ?Limiting? is an interesting choice of words. Right now the ?candidates? are limited to basically one, or maybe two people that a very select group of people deem worthy.

The voting public has no say in who can run, who can be nominated or even who can be ?elected?.

So, the argument that making the position subject to general election somehow ?limits? who can run is, well, specious at best.

The potential candidate list is already extremely limited. How much more limited could it get?

It is true though that a Region-wide election could result in the reality that perhaps only candidates with money ? and a lot of it ? will be able to run for the office. Maybe so, but at least we, the voters, will know who they are and what they stand for.

Right now we have no idea who the candidates are until the night of the vote! Candidates for Regional Chair in 2018 will be forced to put out a platform, speak at debates, make themselves known publicly ? in short, provide us with at least some knowledge of why they should sit in that chair, and why we should let them.

And that's a good thing.

The second motion making its way through the legislature is the SLAPP legislation. SLAPP stands for Strategic Lawsuit against Public Participation. These types of lawsuits are launched for no other reason than to shut people up through fear ? fear of financial ruin.

A reality with which three Aurora families are all too familiar.

This new Act seeks to prevent those in power and/or those with money from abusing their office or their financial status. It will prevent those who hold elected or corporate office from waging legal war on those who dare to question decisions made by speaking their charter-guaranteed right to an opinion.

This legislation has also passed second reading.

Once enacted, Aurorans will never again be faced with a situation as we did in 2010 of unwillingly funding a legal war against private citizens. Our MPP Ballard spoke and voted in favour of this legislation while in the House. Odd. He did exactly the opposite while at the Council table.

No matter.

Better late than never to see the truth and come to the right decision.

If nothing else, with the enactment of the aforementioned legislation, the New Year will see the promise realized of greater access to democratic office and greater protection for those commenting on it. And that's great for all of us.

And on that note, to all our readers, may you have a truly joyous holiday ? Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

See you all again in 2015.

Until then, stay informed, stay involved because this is - after all - Our Town.