

POLITICS AS USUAL: Ides of March

By Alison Collins-Mrakas

I read with interest about the current situation in Alberta; specifically the sturm und drang surrounding Premier Redford's rather ill-advised luxurious trip to South Africa with her daughter and her daughter's friends in tow. The bill to the taxpayers for the trip was a whopping \$45,000. This, when other politicians on the same trip spent a few thousand at most. Clearly, an outrageous extravagance that smacks of old time political entitlement mentality. What I found odd, though, about the furor was that the fury was focused on the money and not on the trip itself. Let's not forget that the purpose of the trip was to attend the funeral of Nelson Mandela. It was not a holiday. Many politicians seemed to lose sight of that fact during Mandela's memorial and funeral ? Obama's disgraceful smiling ?selfie? springs to mind. One does not generally drag one's children to a state funeral. It's hardly a fun for the whole family type of activity. The Premier showed a remarkable lack of judgement for her actions. Regardless of why the taxpayers are outraged ? or why they should be outraged ? the taxpayers of Alberta are outraged. Her fellow Conservatives are outraged. Her riding association is outraged. They've demanded she resign. And even one of her own MLAs quit the party in protest and now sits as an independent. That's a lot of people outraged. Pretty devastating stuff for a politician. Her approval rating sits at a mere 20% and falling ? if the pollsters are to be believed. It's one thing to be seen as, or pass some sort of legislation that's seen as ?unfavourable?, and another entirely to be actively disliked.

And Premier Redford is, apparently, disliked. And ?disliked? is the more polite way of describing it. MLA Webber, the now independent member of parliament, said that Ms. Redford was, ??not a nice lady.?

Well, of course she's not. She's a politician.

Find me a politician that is ?nice? and I will find you one that sits on the back bench ? if she or he gets elected at all.

And I'm not sure what being a ?lady? has to do with the matter.

Unless she's the Earl of Whatever's wife, I don't think she's Lady anything.

Frankly, it's a bit anachronistic to be describing women as anything but women. Being called a ?lady? or worse, not a lady, is pejorative. And it's a throwback to a time when one's class mattered more than one's achievements. The aristocracy of the past has given way to the meritocracy of the present. Let's stay here, shall we?

Regardless of what she's called, the knives are out for the Premier.

Leaked media stories about her revolving door of staff, her ?bullying? (the new favourite buzz word. Everyone's being bullied nowadays.). Her haughtiness. Her terrorizing of the little people. And on and on. It's pretty standard stuff. Over the weekend, Premier Redford was called on the carpet by the directors of her party to answer, as the CBC reported, ?hard hitting questions?that were at times, brutal.? The party is in damage control, trying to stent the bleeding caused by the scandal.

Premier Redford exited the meeting rather serenely, head held high. Smile on her face. She is quoted by CBC as saying she'd received, ?Lots of perspectives on how I can continue to do my job as leader of the party. That's fine. I learn every day.?

Notice how she frames the discussion? She's happy to learn from others' perspectives on her leadership. It was a rather deft verbal smack-down.

She may not be a ?nice lady? but she sure is a tough lady.

On the local scene, the new bloodsport of riding nominations is well underway. The Newmarket/Aurora PC provincial riding has seen some rather intense political in-fighting with a number of casualties already littering the field. It's unclear if there are more to come.

Premier Redford has survived her Ides of March, let's see how well our local politicians ? and political wannabes alike ? fare with theirs. Will it be a case of ?Et tu Brute?? or ?Hail Caesar?? Only time will tell.

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