

POLITICS AS USUAL: It's Our Money

By Alison Collins-Mrakas

I have always found big cheque presentations to be a somewhat curious thing: giant cheques presented with much fanfare by an MP or MPP, or what have you, generally with lots of coverage by local media.

Broad smiles and self congratulatory speeches ensue about wonderful funding initiatives to build better roads, or a new school, or cancer research funding or some other worthy public investment.

They are Feel Good announcements to be sure. I am not knocking the funding, though one can sometimes quibble with what does or does not get funded.

However, the cynic in me can't help but notice that the delivery of giant cheques are usually timed to either distract from some sort of crisis (oh, look at this money we are giving to support needy children, pay no attention to the millions we've squandered on poor energy policies) or burnish to a sheen a government's image as it gets set for another election.

Given that the end result is still that an important initiative is getting some much needed investment, it is ? as the kids say these days ? ?all good.?

But, back to the matter of the giant cheque. Lost amidst the feel good, good news story about funding is the question of whose money exactly is it that they're announcing they're spending? Or, putting it another way, whose bank account is that cheque drawn on?

Well, ours of course! It's our money they are announcing they're spending.

Which brings me back to my initial comment about the incongruity of cheque presentations: it has always struck me as odd to see some government bigwig stand up there, face beaming with pride, as he (or she) announces the latest beneficiary of government largesse. It's not his money he's handing out. It's mine. So why all the fanfare?

And it's not even money that I have willingly given. I didn't say, 'Here, take my money. Go buy yourself something frilly.' It's money that's taken through mandatory taxation.

Again, not quibbling about paying taxes. Of course you need to pay taxes; how else do you fund services that the public needs and wants ? health care, energy, roads, water.

Taxes provide stable funding from which governments can draw to keep our communities protected. And I am not quibbling about the government spending our money on worthwhile initiatives. It's why elect them. To identify priorities and then fund them.

And then we vote them out of office when they don't fund what we think are priorities - or mismanage our money, period.

Maybe I am getting cranky, but what I do take issue with ? and have always taken issue with ? is the smarmy big cheque photo op.

To quote a friend who shares the same opinion as I do about these things, why do they never mention that it's our money? Or at least thank the citizens whose taxes are actually paying for whatever it is they're announcing?

While it's all fine and good to move forward with infrastructure investment, or finally providing broadband coverage to some of our more rural communities, let's never lose site of the fact that at the end of the day, it is all paid for with our money.