

POLITICS AS USUAL: On the other hand?

By Alison Collins-Mrakas

Last week, I wrote about the lack of respect folks feel for politicians and other persons in positions of prestige or power and the reasons ? but not excuses ? as to why that might be.

With many people of prominence revealed to be cheats and liars, it's no wonder that folks have nothing or no one to believe in. It's a case of, ?Fool me once, shame on me??

However, as there are two sides to virtually every story, this week let's look at the flip side to that argument. I argued that it is the Office that deserves respect and that those who are elected to it must earn that respect. Fair enough, but oft times, it doesn't matter what good one does in office, there will always be those that are hell-bent on proving you are the devil.

Indeed, those that occupy offices of high esteem may not in fact be dastardly fellows but may instead be good people trying to do good works for their communities and the constituents they were elected to represent. Personally, and obviously unscientifically, I would say the vast majority of elected officers ? from local councillors right up to heads of state ? are honest, hardworking, civic minded people who truly do want to do the best for those they serve. They have noble purpose.

But given what those who seek, let alone achieve, elected office are forced to endure from the modern day scourge of the trolls, the serial complaint lodgers, and hysterical accusers, one really does have to wonder why anyone with any sense at all would bother to run for office.

The level of vitriol hurled at our representatives is truly staggering. Look at the twitter feed of Hillary Clinton and you will get a scary glimpse into the world of online trolls and the misogynistic, hateful, venom they spew at her. Look at the comments page of any newspaper when it provides coverage of a particular leader and you will get a little taste of what our PM, MPs and MPPs endure on a daily basis.

But even at a local level, the level of toxic commentary is pretty shocking. No question, there are elected officers that are not doing a good job, a terrible job in fact. But few warrant the level of hostility and outright nastiness directed at them from folks with whom they do not necessarily agree.

When nasty comments are not enough, then the allegations fly. All sorts of malfeasance are alleged ? often with not even a scintilla of evidence to support it; but truth is not the point. In this age of 24 hour media, where ?news? is instantaneous, the allegation is all that matters. It's the allegation that makes the headline.

Vindications are printed on the back page. Being right doesn't matter. Many folks believe where there's smoke, there's fire. If even five people believe a lie then the troll's mission is accomplished.

Politicians of every level are subjected to the digital drive by smear, buffeted by serial complaints to the integrity commissioner, the auditor general, the ombudsman or the courts.

On and on it goes.

It is wearying for sure.

Honestly, I have to wonder why any of them bother at all.