

POLITICS AS USUAL: Privacy and Public Office

By Alison Collins-Mrakas

Do you think you have the right to know about the divorce proceedings of anyone who seeks elected office? The nitty gritty of their finances, their claims and counter claims against one another, their custody arrangements, all the nasty, ugly details of their ?conscious uncoupling??

Do you think any of that has any bearing on how or if they should hold elected or appointed office?

I ask because some folks certainly seem to think so.

There has been a spate of media stories recently about Canada's newly appointed Governor General, the accomplished Julie Payette. You know, Canada's second woman in space. A woman who, according to her biography, speaks multiple languages, has multiple degrees, and has been to space ? twice!

That Julie Payette, who is now splashed across the headlines of national newspapers, not for her achievements but because she has sought to keep her private business ? well ? private.

Leaving aside my thoughts about the whole idea of ceremonial offices, I am appalled at the lengths media and others have gone to get the dirt ? because that's what it is, dirt, gossip ? about the circumstances surrounding Ms. Payette's divorce.

Media outlets have sought court orders to open up the private court records of her divorce proceedings. From the sounds of it, her divorce has been acrimonious. Most divorces are. But what makes this one titillating is that it comes with an accusation ? almost immediately dropped ? of assault. And it's that last bit that the media is focused on, the alleged assault. This despite the fact that the charge was almost immediately dropped. As if this is the first divorce in history where the parties make allegedly unfounded accusations against one another in the heat of the battle.

As a consequence of this little tidbit of information, I have now read multiple stories about the ?controversial? appointment of Ms. Payette to Canada's highest ceremonial office.

As if her brutal divorce somehow taints her appointment.

I have made this case before, unless you can demonstrate to me how one's personal life ? one's marriage ? has any impact on how one comports oneself in public office, then I think it's none of our darn business.

If we expect all our elected officials to be paragons of virtue ? spotless, stainless, perfect ? with perfect marriages, two children, and a dog, then we will never have anyone to seek, let alone hold public office. And besides, to get all biblical, who among us should cast the first stone?

Before you send me a flaming email, I'm not saying anything goes.

An advocate of neo-Nazism, for example, would clearly not be a good choice as Canada's Governor General. But the very public metaphorical flogging of an extraordinarily accomplished woman whose great crime seems to be that she went through a horrible divorce is quite simply appalling.

Is it any of our business? No, it is most definitely not.

Personally, I think all this fuss is really just prurient interest coupled with a bit of good old fashioned partisan nonsense. Frankly, if this is what passes for political scandal in Canada ? a nasty divorce - then boy oh boy, we really are pretty boring.