

POLITICS AS USUAL: The enemy of my enemy

By Alison Collins-Mrakas

Well, the hot air of summer just got hotter ? both literally and figuratively.

The Duffy trial began anew and we are in the midst of a federal election campaign. Cue the drama, real or imagined. The media folks and various political campaign teams alike are salivating.

They eagerly await every little morsel, every tidbit of information that crumbles out of the daily trial proceedings in the hopes that it is a) salacious, b) damning and/or c) the coup de grace that will bring down Harper once and for all.

So far it isn't what most in the Liberal or NDP camps (and probably the media camps too) were hoping for: no ?smoking gun? has been uncovered yet in the testimony of Mr. Wright despite the best efforts of Mr. Duffy's lawyer.

Personally, I think it is highly unlikely that a direct link between the now infamous cheque and Mr Harper's knowledge of it will ever be found. Perhaps I will be proven wrong, but I doubt it.

What has been uncovered? Hundreds and hundreds of emails between senior staff in the PMO that reveal how much ?power? staff wields in the day to day workings of the Office of the Prime Minister. Shock! Staff work to manage crises! Again, I am unclear why so many are ?surprised? at the supposed outsized role of PMO staff in terms of how the gears of government grind. I am also unclear how ? or why ? the staff are being defined as ?powerful.? They are functionaries, performing a single, clearly defined task: protect the office of the PM. Period.

This is not news.

Every PM has had the same small army of partisan staffers surrounding them putting out fires. Just the political stripes are different.

It is disingenuous to suggest otherwise. However, that being said, many would agree that, in Harper's case, the magnitude or fervency of the partisanship of his staffers is ?different? than other PMOs; that the emails clearly demonstrate how extreme the ?protect the party, protect the PM? mantra is in Harper's inner circle.

It's difficult to agree or disagree. There are no other PMO staffers' emails amongst each other during a crisis to which one can compare.

But I do not agree with defining the folks who work in the PMO as ?staff.? It gives the impression that they are somehow like all public servants. They are not.

There are two different types of staff in terms of federal and provincial government functionaries ? political and bureaucratic. Senior staff in the PM's or Cabinet Ministers' offices are not neutral. Yes, they are generally highly intelligent and competent people, but they are hired because they are partisan. They work for the party, not us. Elsewhere, the ranks of public service are filled with folks who are hired based on merit alone. They are hired to work for us. And they are ? publicly at least ? politically neutral.

Cabinet office staffers have terms. Public servants have careers. Thus, given that their jobs depend on whether their ?boss? remains in office, of course PMO staffers rabidly protect the office. It's in their best interest to do so.

Again, none of this is news.

Should this arrangement change? Probably, but it's doubtful that it ever will.

In the end, while the enemy of my enemy may be my friend, it doesn't mean I want him to work for me.

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