

POLITICS AS USUAL: Time for Frank Talk

By Alison Collins-Mrakas

I generally ascribe to the belief that all politics is ultimately local, but given the horrific events in France, it is difficult to write about local political matters without seeming somewhat out of touch or self-involved.

Clearly, local issues are mighty small in comparison to those experienced by the people of Paris, or threats of violence faced by millions of people across the globe on a daily basis. It feels wrong to gripe about petty local politics or even broader regional issues when so many others are dealing with a tragedy on a scale that we can scarcely imagine, let alone live.

So I will hold my originally planned piece on the inadequacy and inequity of our public transportation system for another day. Instead, I want to focus on media coverage of the tragedy in Paris.

I have watched CNN's wall-to-wall coverage on the events as they unfolded and continue to unfold. Christiane Amanpour is one of the best, sharpest and most astute foreign correspondents out there. She has been excellent in her reporting, hard hitting, refusing to put forward the simplistic pablum that other commentators feed to the masses.

Other pontificators are not nearly as good and, as a result, we have been subjected to some pretty appalling statements and equally appalling attendant proposed solutions. The US presidential candidates are the most egregious of the pontificators. Ted Cruz' suggestion that Syrian refugees should be subject to a religious test is odious in the extreme.

Aside from the sheer insanity of the suggestion, in the most practical terms, how would this even be achieved? And more important, how is this helpful?

There appears to be two main camps amongst the pundits. Some state categorically that this is a matter of religion, that these people have beliefs that are fundamentally at odds with western values. Others believe it is a matter of extremists using religion to cause schisms in the broader society of humanities that they seek to exploit for their own deranged goals and that anyone who does not espouse their warped worldview is the enemy regardless of their religion.

I do not pretend to have a solution. Really, what is the solution? How does one address the clear and urgent need to provide assistance to desperate people fleeing the very people who seek to destroy us as well? The fact that at least one of the terrorists held a Syrian passport (real or forged) and passed into Europe as a refugee further complicates the matter.

If the situation was easy to solve, then it would have been solved already. The folks trotting out simplistic, black and white solutions to this highly complex matter should just pipe down. Let the grown-ups do the talking.

I believe we have a right to protect ourselves. This will require us to have some uncomfortable conversations to achieve that goal, but I also believe we have a moral duty to help those in need, which will similarly require us to challenge our beliefs about both others and ourselves as well.

To our political leaders at home and abroad I say, now is the time to work together, not score cheap shots to gain political advantage. In the end, any advantage achieved is on the bloodied backs of those at the forefront of this tragedy.