

POLITICS AS USUAL: Tis the Season

By Alison Collins-Mrakas

Well, it's official. It's Christmas season.

The tree is decorated, lights are up, cards have been mailed and the baking has begun.

A calendar full of gatherings with friends and family to look forward to.

The one little wrinkle in this otherwise glorious holiday tableau? Christmas shopping. The dreaded trips to the mall to buy Christmas gifts. Ugh.

Gift giving should be a pleasurable experience, but when it's preceded by the horrors of the mall (or, God forbid, Costco!) in December, it's hard to get any joy out of it. Given that almost a quarter of their revenue is generated in December, retailers do what they can to entice buyers into their stores. So there are sales and bargains and BOGO day, all to get people to buy things they ?need? and ?want?.

Need and want. Two interesting concepts in our comfortable context.

For the many folks fortunate to have homes and jobs to pay for them, there's really nothing they ?need? in the strictest sense. Food, water, heat, home. Those are needs. A Kitchenaid mixer? Not so much. Regardless of how good a bargain it is.

So, that puts most, if not all, the potential purchases firmly in the ?want? section.

But what do we ?want?? If the horrifying CNN videos of Black Friday Shopping brawls are any indication, a lot of people apparently desperately want a humungous flat screen TV, and are willing to debase themselves in violent confrontations to get them.

I am not holier than thou. I did take advantage of some Black Friday Deals ? for Christmas presents, not more stuff for me (though I was tempted by the shoe sales!). I went to the Bay. On Black Friday. I lasted a whopping 53 minutes. That's all I could take. People were rude, pushy and ? well ? a few other words I could use but this is a family newspaper.

The store was a jumbled mess of stuff tossed here and there by folks who were grabbing things and then tossing them aside when they didn't want them.

The poor ladies at the service desk were in danger of being smothered by the near mountain of clothes strewn about their counter by shoppers discarding the ?deals? they didn't want. The floor was littered with clothes that folks had simply dropped there.

The two ladies who assisted me with my purchase looked positively exhausted, but they were still smiling and unfailingly polite. It was the Bay after all.

My own family came to the realization that Christmas gift buying was getting out of hand after one year ? when the kids were younger ? when we couldn't fit the gifts around the tree. We had to stack them against the wall. Literally a mountain of presents. That's not what Christmas is about. We decided to scale things back and, since then, have had less of the frenzied buying and more of the family time.

Yes, we still exchange gifts (everyone likes to get gifts!), but it's no longer the focus ? well certainly not amongst the adults. And that's been a welcome change.

Besides, less presents means less trips to the mall, and that's always a good thing!

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