

POLITICS AS USUAL

By Alison Collins-Mrakas

I am writing this column very early on a rather dreary Saturday morning.

After nearly 10 days of glorious sunshine and warm days, it is a bit of a letdown to return to cold wet and gray, and I fear it has affected my mood and hence my topic of discussion this week.

I am gloomy and glum of countenance and frame of mind. And reading the national newspapers this morning, of course, did not help. Scandal. Disasters. Tragedy. Even the full page story on famous mothers had an entire section devoted to examples of 'bad mothers' both real and fictional. Sigh. Couldn't there be one story with an entirely positive focus? Can't we even leave mum alone? On Mother's day?

As an aside, I wish our major newspapers would take a page out of the books of local papers, such as The Auroran, that make a sincere effort to report the good along with the bad and/or salacious or at least affect a balance of sorts. Unrelenting reports of misery and despair are not the only form of news that the populace requires 'a few 'feel good' stories would be appreciated once in a while.

I would think we are well past the 'if it bleeds it leads' style of journalism. But perhaps that is mere naïveté on my part. Prurient interest in calamity and tragedy does seem to prevail. As does a kind of collective sense of schadenfreude 'or joy in the misfortune of others. Why else are we constantly bombarded with stories of 'fallen' movie stars, and leaders?

Nowhere is this more pronounced than in the political realm.

Reporters seem to relish in uncovering the peccadilloes 'small and large ' of our political leaders and splashing them across our TV screens and newspapers. I don't think you'd be able to find one paper, anywhere, on even one day that is completely devoid of stories of political shenanigans.

Allegations get front page, the more scandalous the better. Retractions or findings of innocence 'if they are reported at all ' are relegated to a back page of course. They've already moved on to the next scandal.

My heart does not bleed for our political leaders, though, as they do themselves no favours, of course.

As I have stated previously, they are a much maligned lot, and justifiably so for the most part. Case in point - a quick scan of the papers this past week revealed reports of an ongoing Conflict of Interest case, potential fraud allegations against members of the Senate, kick backs to local mayors and councillors and an arrest of a former mayor on charges of gangsterism! I had never even heard of that charge before, and certainly not used in the context of a politician.

The former mayor of Laval has been charged with (allegedly) using intimidation and violence to achieve his goals 'which apparently was to get more money.

But our political leaders don't really need the assistance of the media to do damage to themselves, they are quite adept at doing it all by themselves. For example, the seemingly unending cavalcade of nasty, negative ads that lower the public's estimation of politicians to near rock- bottom levels.

The pundits say that negative political ads work 'and I would assume that they must, or they wouldn't bother wasting millions of campaign dollars in their creation. They don't always work of course. The recent ads about newly crowned Liberal leader Justin Trudeau have created a bit of a backlash and most famously, the ad that seemed to mock Jean Chretien's partial facial paralysis backfired colossally, arguably handing the federal Liberals an electoral victory.

Nasty attack ads and negative news stories have shaken the general public's confidence in those who govern and their ability to govern responsibly. If electoral participation rates are any indication ? just 30 plus percent in our most recent municipal election for example ? the public has become disenchanted and thus disengaged.

This downward trend in public participation in the political process needs to change. But for that to happen, we need to have renewed faith in our political leaders; that they will do the right thing, for the right reason.

Recently, Aurora's Council did the right thing for the right reason ? and issued a public apology to the three residents named in an unsuccessful \$6 million lawsuit. It was a right step forward, and to borrow from Councillor Thompson, it was an important decision that reflected a belief in ??accountability, responsibility and being an agent for change.?

It is unfortunate that it was not a unanimous decision, but it is a positive decision none the less.

Let's hope that in this, the last year to year and a half of their term, the Council will be the positive agents of change that they were elected to be and as a consequence re- engage the residents they serve. It's in all our best interests.

That's it for this week. Until next week, stay informed, stay involved because this is after all, Our Town.