

POLITICS AS USUAL: Anything but Usual...

By Alison Collins-Mrakas

Well, after taking a week off from my columnist duties, I am back to the task at hand ? writing about Politics as Usual. But, my goodness, things are anything but ?usual?, are they?

First, we have Duffy's explosive allegations that have resulted in nearly two weeks of tortuous, embarrassing deliberations in the Red Chamber. His dramatic pronouncement, ?there were TWO cheques, folks, yes TWO?? was calculated drama.

I do think it's interesting that he has only made his statements in the chamber ? where he has privilege (i.e. can't be sued). I'd be interested to hear what he has to say when that privilege is removed, but I digress.

Now, mercifully, shunting the near-endless coverage of the Senate debacle off the front page of the national dailies are the even more explosive allegations about the ?activities? of the Mayor of Toronto and massive police surveillance regarding the same. Hundreds of pages of police evidence have been released to the public, about the Mayor of Toronto and alleged drug dealings and clandestine meetings at all hours of the day and night.

But, worse than that, we have none other than the Police Chief Bill Blair, stating that not only does the infamous ?crack? video exist, but he confirms that it is Mayor Ford on the video and he is doing something that is ?consistent with? various media reports.

In other words, The Star got it right. Video evidence of a Mayor smoking crack ? allegedly ? is not a first. Washington Mayor Marion Barry, I believe, has that dubious honour. But, it is a first for Canada ? and it is indeed shocking.

Whether or not the video shows the Mayor actually smoking crack or, rather, marijuana or tobacco, as his lawyer suggests, I think the jig is up.

The message for months was that the video did not exist. Now, as the police have revealed, it does exist (despite someone's best efforts to destroy it). The Mayor was videotaped allegedly smoking what is described as a crack pipe, while sitting in what the police describe as a crack house, with alleged drug dealers and criminals, so what's in that pipe is entirely beside the point, quite frankly.

Quibbling about whether one can ?prove? what's in the pipe ? and hence parsing out just what the Mayor lied about ? the video or the crack in the video - is, to my mind, less relevant. It's the existence and context of the video that's relevant.

And it's an odd defence anyway, if you ask me; a bit reminiscent of Clinton's famous line of defence when caught in a whopper, ?It depends on what the meaning of the word ?is? is??

The strategy didn't work for Clinton, and I doubt it will fly for Ford either.

I, for one, am surprised that the Mayor's advisors did such a poor job of managing this situation. Clearly, they must have known that the Mayor had some personal issues, shall we say, and given the public nature of his position, that someone, somewhere had videotaped him in a rather a compromising position or two.

To deny such evidence exists and fail to plan for its release and publication seems, well, stupid.

But, for all we know, they did have a plan ?B? and it's being ignored. Many politicians operate in a sort of bubble, oblivious to the fact that they may be held to account for their actions.

Which gets us back to Aurora's political world. We've not had any embarrassing reports on our community in national newspapers, at least this term, thank goodness, and we have certainly never had anything like what is happening in Toronto. Indeed, Aurora's current issues look like very small potatoes by comparison ? and almost embarrassingly so.

Getting our proverbial knickers in a twist over access to a phone and desk, or the disposition of three trees on private property, for example, seems positively picayune. I said it before and I will say it again ? some folks, and especially those sitting at the Council table ? need to regain their perspective.

Yes, things can always be improved. Yes, there are areas of concern. But let's leave the pitchforks and torches at home, shall we?

Let's not lose sight of the fact that we have a great community, great people and a clear sense of pride in our Town. We have much to be thankful for.

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