

POLITICS AS USUAL: Long-term leaders

By Alison Collins-Mrakas

Are multi-term incumbents good for the electorates they ostensibly serve?

By that I mean, is it in the community's long-term best interest to have the same MP, MPP or Mayor for three, four or even five terms in some cases?

Given the amount of deadwood that occupies a multitude of elected offices, there are many that have renewed the call for setting term limits to avoid the inertia that results from political "lifers" that currently see elected office as a job for life.

Personally, I am not sold on the idea of restricting particular elected offices to a two-term limit; the whole "lame duck" period that results from term limited offices can be just as negative to governance systems, in my opinion, as the never-ending campaign mode that the political "lifers" engage in.

But, I can see why folks are agitating for it.

It's because once someone has been elected, it can be difficult to unseat them ? regardless of how ineffectual she or he may be.

A local MP, MPP or Mayor and Council can be literally phoning it in ? just cutting ribbons, attending photo-ops and picking up their paycheques ? and yet still get re-elected, over and over.

We've seen it in every community and at every level of office. There's always the one guy that seems to do nothing for anyone and yet somehow, miraculously, gets re-elected.

And why?

Because no one pays any attention. There are always the folks that are involved, watch Council meetings, attend open houses held by their local MPP, read the information sent to them by their MP, and get informed ? but, to be honest, they represent a very small fraction of the electorate.

The rest of the less-than-half of the electorate that bother to actually vote have no idea who they're voting for. They simply vote for the name ? any name, frankly ? that they vaguely recognize, and then pat themselves on the back for voting.

Does that sound harsh? Well, perhaps, but it's true. How else to explain the election or continued re-election of "representatives" who represent nothing but themselves? McGill five, anyone?

It boggles the mind how uninvolved the average voter is in matters as they relate to how they are governed. The decisions made on their behalf shape every aspect of their lives: who they can marry, whether we go to war or not, whether a lifesaving drug is covered by OHIP. And yet, I guarantee you if you polled 10 people on the street right now they could not name their MP, MPP and Mayor, let alone the eight members of Council.

You know, the folks that set your property tax.

This is not to tar all leaders with the same brush.

There are untold numbers MPs and MPPs and Council members who work bloody hard for their community ? and Aurora has been and is lucky to have quite a few truly great representatives.

But folks are tired of those elected officials that are simply playing the part and not doing their part. And I am tired of the folks bemoaning the leadership they have, when they've never bothered to articulate the leadership they want.

On the broader scale, then, I encourage folks to really pay attention ? get informed; get involved. Because this is ? after all ? Our Town.