

Bill Rea ? I'll wait for the next election

An interesting little event happened at Queen's Park last week.

It was so little, in fact, that you might not have heard of it. I saw no mention of it in the media, apart from a brief item on the Newstalk 1010 website.

According to that outlet, a couple of dozen people gathered on the lawn at Queen's Park, calling for new laws that would allow the voters to fire their elected representatives. It seems this rally was prompted by a certain amount of disgust over the way Premier Kathleen Wynne has been running things lately.

I think I can understand the feelings. I'm not too taken with the way Wynne has been running things. It could be my natural conservative instincts at work here. I did not vote for her in the last election, but enough people did to give her a lock on the job for at least another two years.

It is also true that her government is currently dealing with a certain amount of scandal, which may or may not go anywhere. That has people angry.

But it is also true that people are frequently angry at government, and in a democracy, they often voice their indignation. There's nothing wrong with that, but should they have the right to have a duly-elected official canned?

We've been hearing calls for years for some mechanism to be in place to get rid of a person who holds elected office who doesn't perform to the expectations of constituents. What too many people forget (and that evidently includes the two dozen or so folks who congregated at Queen's Park last week) is we already have such a mechanism in place. It's known as the next election.

The concept is simple. If you don't like the way your representative is doing his or her job, vote against that person at the next opportunity. My father, late in his life, developed a philosophy prompting him to vote against incumbents Election Day. "Vote the buggers out!" he would declare, with considerable passion.

But there are many out there who can't wait that long.

There are such things as recall elections. I believe there are some jurisdictions in the United States have them. There are people in this country who like to have them here.

I hope we never do.

Recall elections might sound wonderful, but they carry with them a host of complications.

For one thing, how do we decide if a recall election is in order?

About three years ago, Progressive Conservative MPP Randy Hillier had a private members bill in the legislature, calling for the recall of an MPP if 25 per cent of the people who voted in the last election were to sign a petition calling for it. Taking a hypothetical riding, and hypothesizing that 60 per cent of the electorate actually got to the polls in the previous canvas, that would mean 15 per cent of the eligible voters could force a recall election. The other 85 per cent, who could well be satisfied with the way they are being represented, or are at least prepared to wait for the next general election, would be irrelevant in the matter.

If that sounds democratic to you, see your doctor.

No matter how angry people might be with Wynne and her government, it is a fact that a sizable number are satisfied, or at least willing to stick it out to the next election. It is a fact that we all know that election is going to come, and if we have a problem with the way the government is operating, we'll also get a chance to address it - all of us.

There's another matter. I've heard recall elections being discussed for years. But I have never heard details on how such an event is to be paid for, or who forks up the necessary scratch. And elections, even byelections, are expensive.

Commenting on Hillier's efforts three years ago, Dufferin-Caledon MPP Sylvia Jones said it could cost about \$500,000.

Let us hypothetically assume that residents in a riding in somewhere in Ontario get fed up with their MPP. Let's also assume people like the aforementioned two dozen are able to get provisions in for recalling MPPs. In that event, we have an election.

Who pays for it? Who pays for the polling stations? Who pays for the returning office? Who pays for the people to man the polling stations and returning office, as well as to count the votes? Who pays to have the ballots printed?

Is this paid for at the provincial level? That would mean that the money comes from all the taxpayers.

Why should nice Dufferin-Caledon voters like you and I be expected to pay even part of the freight because voters in some other riding belatedly developed the feeling they had made a boo-boo?

Or should we have the residents of the riding in question pick up the tab?

That sounds a bit more fair to me, although actually collecting the funds could be a bother.

Probably the easiest way would be to tack a special levy on the property tax bill. The Province, I suppose, would have the authority to direct the municipalities to apply the extra tax, although I could sure see the impacted mayors and councillors raising a major

stink.

Residents finding a sudden and unexpected addition to their tax bills are likely to call their mayor and councillor, demanding an explanation. These officials could pass the blame onto those at the Province, for all the good it will likely do, or they could point fingers at the residents who signed the petition calling for the special election in the first place.

I would predict a sizable number of people will simply hold the municipal officials responsible, no matter what they are told, because the municipality issued the bill. It won't matter much that the municipality was ordered to do it. I have noticed, over more than 30 years in this business, that a lot of people don't want to listen to facts, especially once they have their knickers in a twist over something.

The issue of cost is a very important one in a situation like this. We shouldn't knock it either. Democracy, after all, was meant to be many things, but dirt cheap is not one of them.

We all get mad at elected representatives at times, and there are occasions we would just love to see some of them get the sack. But there are times for us to cool down and deal with these problems responsibly.

If you have a person you don't like in office, the only really responsible thing to do is wait until the next election. And as we all know, it will come at a predictable time.

Think of it as a lesson in being a little more attentive at election time. I have often been critical of those who don't vote, stating these people have no business complaining if they don't like the way things are being run. But there's also an obligation on those who vote to be mindful of how they vote. If you don't like the way your representative is performing, just remember it might have been your vote that helped put that person in office.

Be more careful next time.

