

Bill Rea ? Political egos are important

During my first incarnation with the Caledon Citizen, which ran from 1984 to '94, there was one man I used to see quite a lot. I haven't seen him in some years, but there was a time he was very active in local affairs, including the political scene. He never actually stood for office himself, but I know he helped out on several campaigns. I was among a group of men at some function one evening about 20 years ago, when I heard him make an off-the-cuff comment that I have never forgotten.

?You'd have to be either an extreme egotist or absolutely stupid to become a politician.?

I think there is a lot of truth to that, especially considering what they often have to put up with.

Over the years, I have heard many people complain about the arrogance of politicians. In a lot of cases, Person A will accuse Politician B of being arrogant because Politician B vigorously pushes a political agenda that Person A can't stand. In the meantime, Person C will praise Politician B for being visionary, which helps boost the old political ego and makes my job a lot more fun. I was talking to a local politician (who I won't name here) a week or so ago. He claimed he didn't have a political ego. I don't believe it.

If you're going to be a politician, you need an ego; a big one. People in that line of work have to endure a lot of scrutiny and criticism, and that includes what comes from nice pains in the neck like me, and not so nice pains in the neck. And it's frequently the case that the garbage these people have to put up with is undeserved, and are seldom rational.

I have some idea of what that's like because most of my work is available for public scrutiny and criticism. I accept that as part of the game.

I admit I am not a terribly good speller, although I am a lot better than when I got into this business almost 30 years ago. I do pull the occasional boner, and I sometimes get rather harshly-worded emails in response. It goes with the territory, and it's often offset by the praise I occasionally get for my work.

I also sometimes have to endure shots for the stuff I write, simply because people don't like it. On occasions, it's a simple case of shooting the messenger. Other times, I have been obliged to take editorial stands that some people don't like, and have had to field a certain amount of abuse. On the other hand, in my line of work just about any reaction is good news because it means what I have written have made people think and react. Some would call it ?a job well done.?

But politicians don't get the same treatment. True, they are sometimes praised publicly, but more often you'll hear people taking shots at them. And in the final analysis, the only time they really get reliable feedback is when there's an election, and they can be manipulated by a host of factors, including the efforts of well-organized groups of liars.

Politicians have seemingly been the topic of choice over the last week or so.

Prime Minister Stephen Harper has found himself in hot water over the accusations against a couple of people he appointed to the Senate (two former journalists ? And I'm left to wonder if my appointment is coming soon).

I have talked to some people who think this ?scandal? is really going to hurt Harper. It was well-known that I am not a great fan of Stephen Harper, but I don't think this mess he's currently in is going to cause him a lot of harm, nor should it. He's the man at the top of the heap, and since it's a big heap, there's an awful lot to be responsible for. As near as I can tell, he's owned up to his responsibilities, and time will tell what action is appropriate.

Would I like to have seen something better from him? Of course. Have they invented the perfect prime minister? Of course not. For the moment, we kind of have to take what we're given.

Provincially, of late we have been hearing a lot of negative comments about former premier Dalton McGuinty and some of the decisions he made regarding gas plants, as well as other things. And Premier Kathleen Wynne is, for want of a better term, picking up McGuinty's cheque.

There is a bit of a personal connection here. I met the Premier in my early years working in Toronto. In 1994, she ran for (and lost) one of the school trustee positions in my coverage area. A couple of years later, she was in the thick of the fight opposing the creation of the amalgamated City of Toronto that the majority of residents did not want (and there are referendum figures to prove that).

On the other hand, she had to know she was diving into a political cesspool when she decided to seek the leadership of the Ontario Liberal Party, which means she had to know she would have to answer for whatever had gone on before. That's assuming she had no knowledge of what was going on.

The interesting thing about provincial politics is despite the fact people are mad about all the shenanigans, and the accompanying money that's been wasted to pay for them, there's not much call for an election. The best way to hit a politician where it hurts is to

vote him or her out. Yet few are champing at the bit for the opportunity to kick them out. I don't think it's got anything to do with people aligning with Wynne. I've got the feeling it's more a matter of indifference, with voters figuring the alternatives aren't likely to be much better.

Then we come to the problems that Toronto Mayor Rob Ford been having lately, with the allegations that there's a video out there showing him smoking crack. This has been the latest happening in a tough couple of years for the guy, although I have to believe he's the author of some of his own misfortunes. In the current situation, I think he did himself a big disservice by waiting a week before making a statement on the matter.

On the other hand, he decided to get into the line of work he's in, and he had to have some idea of what he was getting into.

Lucky for him, he's got an ego too. In the last week, I'm sure it's come in pretty handy.

