

Celebrating service in all its forms

by BROCK WEIR

By the time you read this, chances are you've already been to the polls.

It is, of course, election season in Ontario and, as of this writing, candidates the length and breadth of the Province are making their final pitches to the people.

They have been knocking on doors, picking up the phone and dialling your number, barraging you with emails or texts, and meeting you at your local bus or train stop to state their cases on your morning commute.

They're not just making their final pitches for your vote, mind you; they are making their final push on a job application for which only you, we, have the power to hire.

This is not a decision that should ever be taken lightly.

The persons who have stepped up to the plate to represent the interests of their community and riding at Queen's Park and, in most cases, their party's vision for Ontario, have taken on a task that is far from easy.

Most will have gone through a pair or two of shoes for the walks up thousands of driveways. Some may have spent a small fortune on throat lozenges to keep hoarseness at bay through the long slog of debates in which most candidates have been willing participants. Others have kitted themselves and their candidates a substantial investment in PPE to ensure the campaigns can continue at full steam, but as safe as possible, for themselves, their teams and the people they hope are their future bosses.

It's certainly not a walk in the park, nor is taking a party's platform door to door, stating your case, listening to where others think the platform you're trying to sell falls short or goes too far, and learning to take these exchanges as constructive criticism rather than a personal attack.

This might be the tallest of orders in a political environment that is, in my view, more divisive and hostile than ever before, but here we are.

You might not agree with each of the candidates who stepped forward to be on the ballot this time around, but it's important to give credit where credit is due: they have the courage of their convictions and should be commended for finding within themselves the strength and the energy to come forward and be the change they want to see in the world.

Yet again, this is not an easy task. If it was, ballots might need an extra page or three to accommodate everyone.

So, in the spirit of this, I would like to congratulate each and every one of you for what you have accomplished thus far and, if the chips fall your way, what you have been hired to do for the next few years.

Whether there's a majority parliament elected to give you a full term to work on the promises you've made to the people, or whether a minority will give you a much narrower window to get things done, I wish you the best in fulfilling your role.

And to voters, thank you for taking the time to do your civic duty whether in person or by mail.

I hope you took the last few weeks to really look at the candidates vying for your confidence, invested the time to read more about them, ask questions of your own, and cast your ballot in a way that best reflects your worldview and your own personal vision for the place we call home.

Candidates who put themselves forward in this election have, whether we agree with them or not, have answered a call to serve. In casting a vote, the electorate has, in turn, answered a call to serve as well: to serve and steer the future. I hope that, however the chips fall, you're happy with your decision and will stay active in the process.

Service these days can mean different things to different people. During an election season, service is a two-way street that sometimes comes to a multi-pronged fork in the road. By stepping up, candidates are performing a service. By voting, the general public is performing a service, but that doesn't stop once all the ballots are counted. Successful candidates are then tasked with serving the public, while the rest of us are tasked with holding them accountable ? a service in and of itself.

But public service is something that should be celebrated each and every day.

Over the past few weeks, many local communities have paid tribute to the volunteers and individuals who work tirelessly day in day out to make the community a better place, often with recognition the furthest thing from our minds.

This was never in sharper focus than in the first two years of the global pandemic, which gifted us with, if nothing else, a fresh appreciation for service and everything that entails.

It continues now with loosened restrictions finally enabling us to celebrate these everyday heroes in person, face-to-face, giving them the recognition that they so deserve.

This week as well we will have another reason to celebrate the concept of service as the Commonwealth comes together for a four-day celebration of the Queen's Platinum Jubilee, an event many of us are unlikely to see again in our own lifetimes.

At the centre of it all, of course, will be Queen Elizabeth II, whose 70 years of dedicated and tireless service as our Head of State and as Head of the Commonwealth, will be at the forefront.

Whether you support Canada's present system of government or would like to see change in how our Head of State is selected, I think most would agree there are fewer finer examples of service than this ordinary woman who was called upon to take on an extraordinary job in very extraordinary times, and rose ? and continues to rise ? to the occasion with extraordinary energy and continuity.

Regardless of your views of the institution itself, this is a platinum-plated opportunity to salute people in the community who exemplify and embody the principles of service that will be commemorated in the days ahead; individuals who serve their neighbours through traditional avenues, on pathways carved out of pandemic necessity, in newly emerging channels, and even through methods that we don't normally consider, including simply doing our civic duty.

Congratulations all around.