

Claire Hoy ? The image: snorters at the trough

There was a time when your humble correspondent not only knew the names of all the federal and Ontario cabinet ministers, but also knew where they were from and had considerable personal knowledge about their careers.

This is not to boast, only to illustrate one of the realities of journalists who spend their days covering places such as Queen's Park and Ottawa, tasks that this writer performed for various newspapers over the course of several years.

And while it's helpful in the day-to-day coverage to know as much as you can about the people you are covering, it also underscores the dangers of getting too wrapped up in the minutiae of the moment and forgetting that Mr. and Mrs. Beleaguered Taxpayer really don't know all these things and, more to the point, don't particularly care to know them.

Again, this is not a criticism of your average person ? why should they spend so many hours of their valuable time sifting through the endless deluge of political information? It's simply to point out that journalists ? and I was as guilty as any ? often tend to get too close to the subject and think the entire world is waiting with baited breath for the next detailed twist in the latest scandal.

All of which brings us, as you may have guessed, to the ongoing Senate ?scandal,? a series of events ? much of them brought upon themselves by the Tories' poor handling of events ? which several experienced media commentators are actually predicting will bring the current government to ruin in the end. I think not.

It is true ? as you may be thinking to yourself ? that unlike the vast majority of journalists, this writer leans sharply right-of-centre and would not be thrilled to see Stephen Harper sitting in opposition.

It is also true ? as regular readers will know ? that I've never been hesitant to dump on the Tories when they're being stupid. And in the case of the Senate shenanigans they certainly have been extraordinarily stupid.

What should have been a minor blip in the parliamentary life of the current government has turned into a lengthy soap opera, thanks mainly to two realities: a)-most of the media hates the Tories and can't wait to make them look bad; and b)- the Tories have done everything in their power to facilitate the general anti-Tory media bias by mishandling the issue from the get-go.

If you think I'm overstating the media bias, let me offer just one recent example. CTV's late-night national news package last Friday pointed out that the Tories had had a terrible week. True enough. But to illustrate this, they went day by day, showing quotes from Senators Mike Duffy, Pam Wallin and Patrick Brazeau, all of them offering damning observations of how their former colleagues dealt with them.

That, too, is fair enough. What isn't fair, however, is that they didn't offer a single rebuttal comment from the Tories. They posted up Duffy's accusation that Harper held a meeting in his office where they openly discussed the controversial \$90,000 cheque from Harper's former chief of staff (Harper has always said he didn't know about it) yet did not tell their viewers that Harper stood in the Commons the next day and flatly denied it.

One of them is lying. So wouldn't it have been fair of CTV to offer viewers both sides and leave it up to them to decide who to believe? There's more, but you get the drift.

Meanwhile, back at the ranch, the twists and turns of this soap opera continue unabated, and the Tories are clearly hoping to put it all behind them soon.

And while the whole thing has been embarrassing for the Tories, it says here that in the scheme of things it will be the greedy senators who come out of this looking the worse for wear. The Harper government isn't going to live or die based on what is in reality a petty internal squabble.

But I think the general public ? not caught up in the day-to-day battle ? will ultimately be left with the impression that these well-paid, fat-cat senators were going above and beyond the call in enriching themselves at the expense of taxpayers.

When Duffy and Wallin, for example, stand up in the Senate to complain that if they lose their Senate privileges they'll lose their gold-plated government health coverage, I suspect that doesn't sit well with everybody else out there who have to make do with OHIP.

These are people of privilege who ? at least as it appears so far ? abused that privilege.

People will forget the details. But they'll remember the image of snorters at the trough. And if Harper ultimately makes them pay for it, it won't do him any political harm.

