

Counting blessings where we find them

by BROCK WEIR

Thanksgiving is always a time to count our collective blessings, but, admittedly, sometimes it feels like the count gets shorter as challenges increase here at home and around the world.

Over the last few years, it sometimes feels like we're being bombarded with new trials and crises just about every day. In addition to our double-barrelled crises of affordability and housing, we have wars and conflicts raging in every-growing swaths of our world, serious and troubling weather patterns which are putting so many more people at risk, upending lives in ways that were previously thought unthinkable.

I'm writing this on Monday, October 7, the first anniversary of the most prevalent conflict in the Middle East.

It's been a year of senseless death and destruction, of boiling tensions both in the conflict zone and in just about every corner of the world. In our interconnected world, we're all stakeholders. If you don't have loved ones whose lives might be on the line, you more than likely have a friend or loved one who has one of their own in harm's way.

On that frontline, the stark lack of any positive movement towards a resolution, any declines in civilian casualties, and a light at the end of the tunnel that hasn't grown beyond a pinprick over the last 12 months, it's all so dispiriting ? as is the way this conflict is manifesting itself locally.

At the start of this week, for instance, York Regional Police stepped up its presence in key location through its wide catchment area, a response to what they describe as ?increased tensions,? with patrols also giving way to additional ?command posts? set up and staffed by Diversity Officers to support the community, whatever their concerns.

It's a terribly vivid reminder, yet again, of our interconnectivity and our collective interest in a peaceful outcome.

Even with this conflict, and it's a conflict that feels like it's growing week over week, out of the equation, we're living in the midst of multifold uncertainty.

It's less than a month away now from the United States Presidential Election, one that has the potential to re-shape our world, leaving just about every part of the political map giving the impression that whatever they hold dear is teetering on a knife's edge.

Here at home, we have our own political challenges.

Now that the Supply and Confidence agreement between the governing Liberals and the NDP has ceased, it's anyone's guess on when the present government will fall; as such, it's a season of near-weekly confidence motions, no matter how mundane the issue, and, once the inevitable finally happens, it's a situation people are already dreading or clamoring for, depending on your own political stripes.

At this point, I feel it must be said that the empty sabre-rattling, name-calling, and other examples of assorted nonsense we've seen on the floor in Ottawa these last few weeks are hardly helping matters on any side ? but it's certainly been an S.O.S. call for Civics lessons the nation-over because so many people are either mistaken or feigning ignorance on how our Parliamentary System of government works in a minority.

But, I digress.

That being said, as Thanksgiving approaches this weekend, it's very important to focus on the things we can be thankful for this

year.

Tireless Community Volunteers

It's often said if you need something done, the best course of action is to ask a busy person to do it. I don't necessarily subscribe to that way of thinking ? I never want to toss something onto someone else's busy plate ? but we're fortunate to live in communities where people are willing to take on challenges, allocate portions of their seemingly-limitless supplies of energy to try to make the places in which they live ? and, indeed, the wider world ? better than how they found it.

I look to the seniors still with us who were called upon to ?do their bit? in one of the darkest chapters of our collective recent history who, with those early seeds of duty planted, continue to do so however they can, large or small. I also look to the youth, often but not always guided by their educators, who have been instilled with the passion to identify problems and come forward with resources, virtual or tangible, to come up with real solutions to real problems facing the real world.

Out-of-the-box thinkers and their solutions

When I first started my working life, albeit in a different field, I often encountered what felt to me a peculiar school of thought. In one fundraising effort in this other field, for instance, someone chimed in to make an unusual, but highly effective-sounding suggestion on how to increase money flowing towards the cause.

?Well, we've never done it like that,? was the immediate response, and, with just a few quick words, cold water duly doused the idea and the individual was never seen at that particular forum again. Thankfully, the idea of something simply not being ?the done thing? has largely given way to some out-of-the-box solutions.

A recent example came to the fore last week from Toronto's University Health Network which has partnered with a non-profit housing group to offer more than 50 permanent housing units to homeless individuals who would likely seek services within the hospital network due to their precarious living situations.

?The project, named Dunn House, is officially opening Thursday, with residents expected to move in over the coming weeks and months,? CP24 reported last week. ?University Health Network has earmarked all 51 apartments in the building for those who use its hospitals frequently and are willing to move there? The homes are set up to help unhoused individuals with complex medical and social needs. Some people who were set to move in have died before the project's opening, which highlights the need for such a space.?

A sensible partnership borne out of necessity in a world that sometimes appears more inclined to mask a problem rather than brainstorm solutions.

The Silver Lining

I've sometimes been criticized for trying to find a silver lining, however elusive, in just about anything. Perhaps it is, at ?best?, annoying to some, or, worse, a sign of ?toxic positivity,? but I think it's important to do so. Hey, there's even a silver lining to be found amid the aforementioned political uncertainty.

When there is uncertainty, or if you have questions, it's important to seek out answers ? and I'm glad people are beginning once again to look beyond their echo chambers to trusted media sources and elsewhere to do just that. While people are indeed uncertain over what the future holds in many paths, it has, in my observation, created a population ? and yes, I'm painting with the broadest of brushes here ? that is more engaged and informed than ever before.

For that, I think we can all be grateful.