

Flag Flap

by SHERALYN ROMAN

If you happened to catch a recent Council meeting you might have noticed mayoral candidate Mario Russo wrapped in a Canadian Flag, being held together at the neck by a binder clip. It was, to put it mildly, an unusual sight. Was it a desecration of the flag? Disrespectful? Perhaps just an innocent mistake that more than anything reflected a lack of decorum in Council chambers?

To me, it's an interesting debate and perhaps my fellow Caledon residents have an opinion, too. Whether you are bothered or unbothered by the flag flap, for me, when some folks called Mr. Russo to account, it was his ?doubling-down? in defense of his actions that I found most troubling.

For context, the issue arose as a result of a flag raising ceremony meant to recognize Accessibility Week. Mr. Russo sits on the Accessibility Committee. I have some questions about Mr. Russo's questionable choice of attire:

If you sit on the Accessibility committee and the committee planned on wearing red to the photo op/flag raising ?in solidarity and in recognition of Accessibility Week? shouldn't you have known to wear red? Was the failure to do so a result of being unprepared, or just forgetful?

If, as you stated, the Canadian flag was ?the only red item near by? [sic] how is it you were pictured, together with the Accessibility Committee at the flag raising, not wearing the Canadian flag, but rather, a red t-shirt as was originally requested of you? Did these two events in fact happen on two different days? If so, I'm confused by your explanation justifying the flag wearing.

In response to being called out by members of the community for wearing the flag in Council, you offered this explanation: ?someone suggested I where [sic] the flag the only red item near by.? Honestly, are you really going with the old ?someone told me to? excuse? That's the kind of thing I might have tried on my Mother back when I was five and she would have responded with ?if someone told you to go run in traffic would you?? Her message, loud and clear, was that just because ?someone told me to? is not a good excuse for making a poor decision, and that perhaps I needed to listen to smarter people. She wasn't wrong.

Mr. Russo later shared that he is a ?proud Canadian? and that he was draping the flag ?respectfully and with pride,? likening doing so to an athlete draping the flag around their shoulders after years of hard work and training resulted in an Olympic victory. Perhaps splitting hairs seems mean-spirited to you, but athletes train hard, often for decades, for the privilege of representing our nation on the GLOBAL stage. If they want to wear the flag in victory - that is an example of NATIONAL pride. Wearing one in council chambers because you came unprepared for a photo op just doesn't seem quite the same to me.

I'm assuming sir, that at no time did you let the flag touch the floor. Assuming also, as you stated, that you are a proud Canadian you would know the various rules of etiquette around flag handling, including: ?The flag must never be allowed to touch the ground, floor, or deck.? I do hope when you assumed your seat at Council you weren't actually sitting on the flag.

The truth is, for me the bigger issue is Mr. Russo's response to being called out for setting a poor example of decorum in Council. He stated, ?I will never apologize for wearing my flag proudly? and that he would ?do it again anytime.?

Respectfully sir, I think you are missing the point.

As someone who wants to be considered mayoral material, leading this community into the future during incredibly challenging times, you need to lead by example. Take ownership for when you are called out for making a questionable decision (because it was, even if you disagree) and set an example, not by stamping your foot and proclaiming you'll never apologize, but rather, by acknowledging that you made a decision that some consider ill-informed.

Acknowledge too, by way of an apology, the bigger issues which are: not being prepared for the flag raising ceremony, and for responding like a kindergarten kid by saying 'someone told me' to wear it. Also (and this might be the word nerd in me) but leadership also demands that you take the time to edit your work. One mistake happens to us all, two is a stretch. If you want to be Mayor, you need to set an example and as yet another saying goes, 'the devil is in the details.' Proofreading is a thing and there are plenty of online tools available to make it easy for anyone to do so. I've made mistakes myself, we're all human, but spelling is an easy fix.

Finally, what's not so easy to fix is the very real, and unfortunate, side-effect of this flag flap. The acknowledgement of Accessibility Week was tainted by your ill-advised decision and its resulting backlash and if for no other reason, for that you should apologize. Perhaps I'm judging too harshly? I'll let my fellow Caledon Canadians decide.