

Getting as good as we give

by BROCK WEIR

It should come as no surprise to readers that people sometimes think I am older than I am.

I hope it has less to do with the rapid growth of silver and white coming out of my follicles, although that is particularly seasonal at this time of year, and more to do with experiences I've collected over my life ? which is, for anyone keeping score, still less than 40 years! ? but we can't have everything.

People in the online world, for instance, sometimes react as though I have my first half-century behind me when I say I have memories of seeing a ?new? Katharine Hepburn film in theatres in its first run ? apparently forgetting she took one last kick at the can in 1994's ?Love Affair? alongside Warren Beatty and Annette Benning.

Or, the newer and less likely social media cachet that appears to come being able to remember watching at least the last three seasons of ?The Golden Girls? in primetime. Oh, those younger millennials who have only discovered the classic comedy in the last five or ten years!

Or even being able to put up my hand to say my first ever vote was for Joe Clark.

Okay, that last one can sometimes elicit the suggestion of a ?record scratch.? After all, he left 24 Sussex Drive in 1980, but let me explain.

As an unusually politically-engaged youngster, I was very interested in elections and what each of the leaders ? Federally or Provincially ? had to offer. Clark's return as leader of the then-Progressive Conservatives caught my attention. Maybe it was the spot-on impression of Clark the Royal Canadian Air Farce offered up, maybe it was the sense, even at that age, that he approached politics slightly differently that did it, but my tween and early teen self was intrigued.

When it came time to go to the polls, I mounted my own ? ultimately successful ? campaign to accompany my parents into the voting booth to make my own final pitch and see that all-important X marked on the ballot wherever it may. But I remained hopeful the wind would blow ?our? way.

I wasn't particularly hopeful he and the party would sweep to victory, mind you, as the Progressive Conservatives were still trying to rise fully back from the ashes of the 1993 Federal Election, but even though I wasn't old enough to vote by any stretch of the imagination, I was well aware that things like democracy and good government are only as good as what you put into it. And I wanted the feeling, at the very least, of having done my part.

Clark has largely come and gone from the political stage, occasionally tapped by today's leaders to flex some diplomatic muscle, and the local candidates who stood in that election have gone on to greener non-political pastures, but what remains, at least for me, is that feeling that good government requires good participation.

This participation can take many forms.

It can be as simple as putting in the effort to be ? and stay ? informed on issues that matter, such as staying up-to-date on civic life through reliable sources beyond social media feeds. From a personal standpoint, few things frustrate me more than seeing people express shock and indignation that a decision has been made at any level of government when all the relevant information had been hammered home through various media for several months running.

Actually, one thing that frustrates me more than that is people complaining about the government ? or the leaders ? they got well

after the fact when they didn't take the time to vote in the last go-round.

In Ontario alone, following the last Provincial election, that came out to nearly 60 per cent of voters sitting on the sidelines and letting the chips fall where they may.

If a government and democracy is only as good as the time and effort you put into it, that's a staggering number. But, of course, it's not just up to voters to make the effort. It's incumbent on leadership ? potential or incumbent ? to do the same.

Significant change has taken place on Ontario's political landscape since residents went to the polls last year. Doug Ford still leads the Progressive Conservative government at Queen's Park, but closest rival, NDP leader Andrea Horwath, has gone on to lead Hamilton, Liberal leader Steven Del Duca has gone on to take the reins in Vaughan, leaving long-time Green Party leader Mike Schreiner the most consistent voice of opposition on and beyond University Avenue.

Marit Stiles assumed her role as Leader of the Opposition as head of the NDP earlier this year, serving as an effective counterpoint to the Ford Government as well, but one voice that has been missing from this has been a permanent head for the Liberals.

That all changed this past weekend with the election of Mississauga Mayor Bonnie Crombie to the position after a hotly contested, but refreshingly collegial (well, by and large) leadership campaign.

?Doug Ford and his Conservative government haven't just lost touch with the people of this Province, they have deliberately ignored people's needs,? Crombie challenged in her acceptance speech over the weekend. ?Doug Ford cut class sizes and better supports [for] our educators, but he would rather pick fights with teachers instead. People across Ontario are ready for a government that prioritizes the things that you care about: a universal healthcare system that supports you when you need it; groceries, utility bills you can afford; and education that sets you up and your kids up for success; and communities that care about each other and our climate.

?Together, we're going to create a policy platform that speaks to the needs of people across this Province. We're going to talk to communities from every corner of the Province so that we can show what it looks like to have a government that listens and cares.?

Only time will tell how successful Crombie and the Liberals will be in that; after the last two Provincial elections, the only thing that is patently clear is they certainly have an uphill climb ahead of them.

Time will also be the only tell whether this translates to voter turnout, but let's hope so.

What I'm heartened by, however, is that all of our Provincial parties are locked in with leaders that appear to have both permanency and energy, the support of their base, and the political clout that comes with all of those elements.

Having each party, government or opposition, firing on all cylinders is a win for all of us ? for opposition parties better able to hold the government accountable, and vice versa, and, most importantly, challenge everyone to do better.

Now, when the time comes, it's up to all of us to do our part: show up.