

Hyperbole you can sink your teeth into

BROCK'S BANTER

By Brock Weir

Ontario's Ministry of Education has taken several hits over the last two-and-a-half years.

You know why. You may or may not agree with it, but you know why.

But, of course, we must give credit where credit is due.

A number of strides have been taken in recent months to modify the Province's school curriculum to better reflect the world we live in and better equip our students to be able to tackle very modern issues through modern methods, gain the skills they need for the jobs of tomorrow, and even impart some practical tips on how to make your buck go the extra mile around the house.

Changes to the science curriculum have, for instance, put increased emphasis on STEM ? Science, Technology, Education and Math ? which the Ministry says will ?support the next generation of scientists, innovators, and entrepreneurs.?

?From finding new cures for cancer, to space robotics that reach new planets, and the development of artificial intelligence and technologies that are changing the economy, Ontario's new science and technology curriculum is focused on giving young people the skills to think critically, dream boldly, and chart new pathways forward for our economy,? said Minister of Education Stephen Lecce earlier this month.

Great ? and not a moment too soon. I wish I had these opportunities in school myself. But, let's continue.

Last Spring, moves were also made to bring the math curriculum up-to-date with focuses on coding, data literacy, mathematical modelling and, in my opinion, most importantly, financial literacy.

?To better equip students with the skills they need to succeed, lift student math performance, and strengthen numeracy skills, the course: ensures relevance to today's job market with an emphasis on life skills ? from the concept of interest, debt, saving, personal budgeting, and price comparisons; builds on learning from the modernized and landmark Grade 1 ? 8 math curriculum to better prepare students for more advanced math to allow students to pursue any postsecondary, skilled trade and pathway in science, technology, engineering and mathematics that they choose; [and] helps students prepare for the jobs of tomorrow by introducing new learning of how to apply coding skills to understand complex mathematics and to make predictions.?

Perfect. Again, these are opportunities I wish I had in school myself.

These changes will certainly make students better equipped for whatever world we're living in five, 10, 20 years down the line, but, while we're at it, let's go whole hog in bringing our curriculum up to date.

I believe one of the first steps should be a complete overhaul of ? and increased emphasis on ? the high school civics curriculum. It might not sound like the sexiest of topics, particularly compared to those scientific and mathematical vixens, but, after last week, I'm more convinced than ever before that it is needed.

When news broke last Monday that the Federal Liberal government had struck a deal with the NDP securing their support on matters of confidence to keep the incumbent government chugging along until 2025, people from coast to coast to coast dusted off their textbooks and their copies of the Constitution and handbooks on the Westminster system of government to do a full analysis of just what transpired.

No, of course they didn't.

The phrases "power grab" and "coalition government" were thrown around with wild abandon while people took to their phones and keyboards to shout, "This isn't what we voted for!?"

It may not be what Canadians had in mind when they cast their vote, but this is one perfectly reasonable – and not exactly novel – outcome of Canadians voting in a minority government. It's by no means a "coalition government" despite some politicians trying to make the idea happen, and, as for a "power grab" well, that probably depends solely on what political colour you happen to bleed.

"The NDP-Liberal coalition is nothing more than a callous attempt by Trudeau to hold on to power," said Interim Conservative Leader Candice Bergen in what is, I suppose, an exercise in branding for the agreement. "Canadians did not vote for an NDP government. This is little more than backdoor socialism. Trudeau is truly polarizing politics which is what he likes.

"This is an NDP-Liberal attempt at government by blackmail. Nation-building is replaced by vote-buying; secret deal-making over parliamentary debate; and opportunism over accountability. With rising inflation, out-of-control cost of living, and national unity at stake, Trudeau knows he is losing the confidence of Canadians. His answer is to stay in power at all costs including implementing the even harsher and more extreme policies."

Extreme hyperbole in the statement aside, I personally find the comments to be an attempt to sell Canadians a product isn't fully rooted in reality.

If out-of-control cost-of-living is an issue to be taken seriously, I fail to see how national pharmacare and dental plans will do anything but help countless Canadian families who are struggling to make ends meet and have to routinely consider whether to worry about rent and putting food on the table first instead of picking up much-needed prescriptions and getting that festering toothache addressed.

Harsh? Extreme? Hardly, in my view. And these are hardly unique ideas that came out of nowhere for anybody who actively followed the last Federal election.

More extreme and dangerous, in my opinion, is trying to convince Canadians, many of whom are already under some unusual ideas about how our governments operate (minority or otherwise) that any of this is particularly unusual.

Minority governments have been deftly stickhandled by Liberal and Conservative administrations both over the last 20 years. In order to get things done and accomplish what Canadians voted them to do in the first place, Paul Martin, Stephen Harper and Justin Trudeau all have had to be flexible and find common ground with opposition parties – and, all things considered, they did so successfully.

What transpired last week was hardly reinventing the wheel and trying to sell it as anything otherwise is, in my view, doing a disservice to Canadians and our democracy.

As we have seen in so many parts of our world in recent years, democracy is a fragile animal and the more we know about ours will only ensure its future.

Civic literacy is more important now than ever before.

Doubling down on its emphasis today will help voters of tomorrow both recognize how our system works and when leaders of any stripe are trying to push a narrative that holds less water than a colander.