

I have so many questions

by SHERALYN ROMAN

It occurred to me this past weekend that many Ontarians might not actually have a clue whose running in the upcoming provincial election.

You know, the election that hasn't been formally announced yet but with Doug handing out goodies like the Easter Bunny, we know it's coming soon.

Candidates have until May 12 to submit their paperwork to Elections Canada but with the actual election scheduled for June 2, 2022, I'd kind of like to know who is running and why (and soon!)

If I understand correctly, there is a fellow who just had corrective eye surgery so he'd look more appealing to his fellow citizens and a woman who leads the Official Opposition who it seems is very good at opposing things, but we need better from all three candidates if we're to make an informed decision about who will lead us over the next four years.

Maybe I'm watching the wrong news channels or following 'bots' instead of people on Twitter but I have so many questions and sadly, it's looking like most will remain unanswered.

I feel bad for Stephen Del Duca. Image aside (who cares if he wears glasses or not) he's got his work cut out for him just trying to rebuild a party decimated in the last provincial election. He's acknowledged on the Liberal website that the party is in a 'fight for its life.' Unfortunately, we need more than that if they are to have any hope of toppling a government that polls suggest has a good chance of being successful, even if its policy of unmasking, and misleading COVID counts, kills off a significant number of its supporters.

The Liberals are promising an increase to minimum wage that is region-specific (higher minimum wages paid in communities where there is a higher cost of living) as well as 10 paid sick days but it's too little too late to save us from a sixth wave. Mind you, at least Del Duca is 'promising' to implement sick days. It seems Mr. Ford wants only to pretend we've moved on from COVID and the pandemic is over, this despite the fact that while he has banned mask wearing in schools, he and his cohorts are still wearing them in the legislature. Why?

Andrea Horwath frequently makes the news for criticizing the government and I guess that's her job, but if we're to see any kind of a shift in voting patterns we'll need more than opposition - we need strong policy suggestions.

One area the NDP are seeking to strengthen is mental wellness, with a commitment to a Universal Mental Health Care Program, one that we could certainly use particularly after these last two devastating years.

Perhaps it could have been funded by the tiny trickle of money being 'returned' to us by the PC's commitment to cut the cost of license plate stickers and refund each of us two years' worth of payments. Have you received yours yet? Four drivers and three cars in our house and not a sign of any refund! Speaking of stickers and 'refunds' I'm also wondering how the government plans to track parents who are in arrears for child care payments, people who don't renew their stickers annually and /or those who don't carry valid insurance and who haven't paid outstanding fines. I'm guessing that this lost revenue, driving without insurance and hungry Ontario children don't matter much.

Meanwhile, all polls indicate that almost 40% of the province will vote Conservative. It seems the 'buck a beer' trend continues, only this time we're being offered a 6 cent per litre temporary cut in gas taxes, one that falls 4 cents/litre short of the promised 10 cent/litre cut made during the last provincial election. Why was it never implemented? Apparently, it was the Feds' fault. Why did \$10/day daycare take so long to implement? Apparently, it was the Feds' fault. Why has the Conservative budget been postponed

twice and why have Mr. Ford's mandate letters not been released? I'm sure that's somehow the Feds' fault too!

On the outskirts of our ?election radar? and not mentioned in our opening paragraph we have Mike Schreiner of the Green Party. Their website is chock full of ?Add Your Name? opportunities to join the fight by sending an email to the sitting government.

I won't lie, they include important and lofty goals like justice for Grassy Narrows where the water has been poisoned by mercury for decades. Safe drinking water for First Nations is indeed long overdue. The greens are also calling for the cancellation of the Bradford Bypass and Hwy 413 (both of which I happen to agree with) but I'm sceptical of their potential for success against the very deep pockets of those who own land at or near many of the proposed interchanges on these highways and who typically support ?blue.?

Facts are facts and we know that hundreds (if not thousands) of acres of prime farmland and wetlands and wildlife habitats will be destroyed. However, if we don't care about drinking water for humans, is it fair to ask us to care about water for little things like growing crops, or supporting wildlife?

I wonder too whether the outcome of the election might be swayed by the approximately 50% of the population who is, or identifies as, female? The same poll that suggests Ford's government will be elected again ? despite any misgivings - also identified a significant gender gap in voter preferences.

While 46% of men said they would support the PC party, only 28% of women claimed they would do so.

I can't help but ask one last question: I wonder if this divide is the direct result of the gender inequity that has become even more pronounced during the pandemic?

Bill 124 caps the wages of nurses, who are overworked and overburdened, and a profession largely populated by females. It does not cap firefighters or police salaries, professions that are still somewhat male oriented. PWSs too, even with a temporary wage gain (with alleged promises of it being made permanent) are often women and have also been denied fair pay and access to paid sick days throughout these past two years. It should come as no surprise that women may not be inclined to vote Conservative.

If this proves true, and anyone else in the province thinks similarly, then Mr. Del Duca, Ms. Horwath and Mr. Schreiner had better figure out their messaging and fast because while I have so many questions of Ford and the Conservatives that I'd love to hear the answers to, no one else appears to be saying much either.