

It's that time to flex your rights ? no ?convoy? required

BROCK'S BANTER

By Brock Weir

It was next to impossible to pull off, but it was worth a shot.

Last week, as mentioned previously in this space, was the back-to-back birthdays of my parents. A busy time of year by any measure, this year was doubly so as both, born five years apart (plus a few hours), were celebrating milestone birthdays.

In anticipation of the weekend that was, as many of our Provincial candidates formally kicked off their campaigns a few days early on Saturday and Sunday, I took a rare day off on Friday to spend some time in the sun on Toronto's Ward's Island with the birthday girl.

A beautiful oasis that makes you forget you're smack-dab in the middle of Canada's busiest city, it was nice to almost completely unplug for a few hours knowing that it will be very busy days ahead in the lead-up to June 2's election.

I wasn't able to fully pull off the same feat on Saturday as we marked my dad's birthday in Orillia.

Campaigns were launching left and right, and, with four sets of candidates in the areas I cover finding their respective positions at the starting gate, it was hard to know where to look first.

Thankfully, I had some time to get my bearings on the way up Lake Couchiching.

Heading north, our trip on the 400 was thwarted by two factors: widening work near King Road which, ironically, reduced the width of the highway by two lanes, and a rag-tag group of pick-up trucks and other SUVs making their way ?somewhere? to once again ?fight? for freedoms we currently enjoy and always have.

Lest anyone think I am judging a book by its ? wheels? I hasten to add the myriad flags flying from each vehicle took out much of the guesswork, anywhere from two- to eight-deep, hurling four-letter words at the Prime Minister, promoting a foreign election that ended decisively almost two years ago, keeping alive the ?legacy? of a one-term president, curious mashups of the Canadian and U.S. flags, pennants and spray-painted bed sheets calling for the end of ?mandates? that ended several weeks ago, and other eclectic sights.

While I presumed they broke off from the rest of the protestors who were staging a better-weather re-enactment of a one-sided battle that ended this past winter and was made all but moot when mandates were eventually lifted, I had plenty of time to examine the scene in the gridlock.

You can never get too far away from politics these days; heck, one of the first things you see when you roll over and open your eyes for the first time each morning and grapple for your phone are alerts to some kind of political message, outreach or calamity on your screens.

I don't know why I tried to avoid some of it this past weekend; the tone was set.

By the time we broke through the impasse, I lost sight of this group and it was smooth sailing up to Orillia.

A short time later, the birthday festivities turned to a local restaurant. All things, of course, must come to an end and before I was finished my cider out on the patio, the same group from the 400 rounded the corner.

Was there a rallying point in Orillia that day? Where were they coming from? These questions went unanswered as I focused back on my chicken club, but at least one answer would soon reveal itself.

Stepping into the parking lot after the meal, there was a clear view across the street: they were occupying a table or two at Montana's, presumably exercising their freedom to mow down a mile-high mudpie.

Politics are inescapable these days and if you're hoping for a respite in the months ahead, you're simply out of luck ? just ask the diners! ? but that's not a bad thing.

Politicians, incumbents and newcomers alike, are vying for your vote in just a few weeks' time, hoping to raise their voice at Queen's Park on your behalf.

At the municipal level, registration is now open for the residents ? your neighbours, your friends ? who feel the call to step up and serve the community around the Council table, whether as a potential Mayor, Councillor, or school trustee.

You may want a break from it, but they want your ear, so why not give it to them?

With a double-barreled election season, your views are more important than ever before.

They want your vote, they will work to get it and, it is hoped, they will take your views to heart over the course of the campaign trail

But it is also a two-way street.

In order for this to happen, you need to be informed, stay informed, and have questions of your own.

If the last few years have taught us anything, it's that democracy can be a very fragile thing.

It doesn't take much to make it wobble, as the assault on Washington so sadly but aptly illustrated; but then again, it really doesn't take all that much to underpin it, either.

The right to vote is one of the fundamental ones enshrined in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, a document waved around so willy-nilly these days with little understanding or appreciation for what is actually written on the page. But voting is not a right that should be exercised with wild abandon.

If knowledge is indeed power, so too is civic literacy.

You now have four weeks or so to do the work necessary to make an informed vote at Queen's Park. You have a little while longer to get a handle on the persons vying to be your local representatives.

Find out about who is applying for the job only you have the power to hire for.

Don't be afraid to ask them the tough questions, to speak honestly on the issues that matter to you, to perhaps shed the party lines you follow simply out of habit and do a deep dive into which party (or individual, in the case of municipal politics) best reflects your worldview, your vision for Ontario and your local community.

Put in the effort to get out the vote if a candidate or party really speaks to you, and even get to know the concerns and views of your neighbours ? even if it's over a cool and sticky slice of mudpie.