

Memorable but meaningless

by SHERALYN ROMAN

In today's column we lament politics, particularly the notion that democracy is democratic, and/or anything other than a hot mess of name-calling and sloganism. I mean, of course it is actually all of these things and while imperfect, it is certainly fundamentally better than any other political system that has been tried and failed around the world. It is messy, contradictory, often ineffectual and as evidenced in federal parliament right now, unnecessarily divisive. Still, it's all we've got and in Canada it is 100% better than much of the rest of the world. That said, politically speaking, here's just a little snapshot of what's on my mind, both the memorable and the meaningless - which often, is the very same thing.

Let's start with all those meaningless yet memorable slogans some politicians toss about. Not sure he should be proud of it, but Pierre Poilievre provides a masterclass in sloganism. He has managed to rally a significant number of the population with just three meaningless words: "axe the tax." Mr. Poilievre has no concept of climate change and the role of the tax nor apparently does he understand that many Canadians get more money back in rebates than they paid towards the carbon tax in the first place. But, it makes for a great t-shirt when you have no actual talking points and, to be fair, the Liberals are doing a terrible job of marketing (explaining) the role of a carbon tax rebate in the first place.

Conservatives may well win the next election solely on the backs of this memorable but meaningless slogan, without ever having to divulge any actual plans or policies they would put in place. Oh, and by the way, name-calling like "Sell-out Singh" and "Carbon-tax Carney" is nothing more than schoolyard bullying tactics. As for "Bring it home," bring what exactly? Also, three appears to be the magic sauce when creating a more "memorable" phrase.

Speaking of winning elections, and with the possibility of an early election looming for Ontarians, politicians continue to assume the populace is stupid and we continue to prove them correct by falling for the Ontario equivalent of meaningless yet memorable slogans time and time again. Remember "buck a beer"? Well, I don't know about you, but now that beer is available at just about every corner store in Caledon, I have yet to find a single bottle or can priced at just a loonie. I sure remember the slogan and Doug Ford capitalized on it big time to get himself elected, but did it mean anything at all? Did it help with the cost of living, or to feed hungry school children, staff our hospitals or house the homeless? Nope - but boy do we remember it.

A memorable announcement from our own municipality is good news: speed limits have been lowered across Caledon "yay!" This is indeed welcome news, but I fear it may be meaningless given our particular challenges with illegal trucking yards, the sheer volume of trucks on the road right now, and the recent but contradictory announcement by Premier Ford to increase speed limits across the province, even if he did say only "where it is safe to do so." Such announcements make it hard for folks to focus on which messaging matters more and I fear human nature results in most of us simply hearing what we want to hear. In Caledon, many seem to want to hear that speeding is "A-Ok."

One hopeful caveat to that last paragraph: in what I hope will prove to be memorable, and NOT meaningless news, is the recent convening of the Caledon Community Road Safety Advocacy Group (CCRSA). This is a group of residents working together across our region to focus on "immediate tactical solutions to address the current road safety emergency in Caledon, and as feasible, within surrounding municipalities." This is good news indeed and an explanation of their important work is covered elsewhere in this paper. With various hotspots across Caledon, and increasing truck traffic and hundreds of illegal trucking yards wreaking havoc in our community, residents banding together en masse to effect change is a positive step forward. At the time of writing this column, two important things have already happened; Council will be hearing motions on four traffic focussed areas of concern and Mayor Groves will have tabled a motion to officially declare a road safety emergency here in Caledon. I hope such a move may help efforts to bring provincial partners to the table during any future discussions around traffic safety locally, leading to meaningful AND memorable change for Caledon residents.