

National Affairs by Claire Hoy ? Gender had nothing to do with it

Politics, as most people will know, is a blood sport.

The mob loves you when you're up and turns on you the moment you're down. And it has nothing to do with a particular political party, but everything to do with crass political opportunism and partisan payback.

In reality, it doesn't matter if you're a man or a woman. A failed politician is, well, a failure. Out with the old. In with the new.

I well remember back in 1971 the day Bill Davis and his new Tory cabinet were sworn in at Queen's Park, when all the newbies were swirling around facing the cameras and the pencils and I spotted the recently retired premier John Robarts standing all by himself on the other side of the hall leaning against a pillar. He was alone. No cameras. No aides. Just him.

A few weeks earlier Robarts had been one of the most powerful men in Canada. Now, because he was out of office, he was just another witness to the changing face of Ontario politics.

Ambling up to him, your correspondent asked Robarts what he missed most about being in power. ?The phone stopped ringing,? he lamented, a short, sharp, immensely powerful reaction to what had become his new reality.

Some politicians continue to hold sway after they leave office, but very few. Most are either given a dinner before being sent on their merry way or, if they've been forced out by corruption or incompetence ? or, as is often the case, both ? they're hustled out the door and into history faster than a speeding bullet.

Like a professional ballplayer who can't keep up with a fast ball any more, the management reclaims their uniform and sets about signing somebody else to take their place.

That's about as predictable as night and day.

But something else equally predictable, alas, is that when the failed politician is female, there will be those in the media/political/academic elites who claim that she was treated more harshly than a male politician would be.

It was just a matter of time then, in all the coverage of former Alberta premier Alison Redford's spectacular political flame-out, that the usual suspects will claim that her gender had something to do with her decline.

And so, in the Saturday Star, veteran journalist Linda Diebel's feature on Redford, in outlining the myriad of poor decisions and wanton spending that ended Redford's career, predictably ventured into the gender politics angle.

?Redford's daughter Sarah, now 12, flew 50 times on government aircraft from September 2011 to March 2014,? writes Diebel. ?On two of these trips, she flew without her mother and four times with friends. The issue of Redford's child is a sensitive one among some political scientists, who point out that many ? but not all ? of Redford's arrangements appear understandable for a mother. ? Really? They do? Do they really believe that if a man was flying his son and their friends around on government aircraft at public expense nobody would care. And why, exactly, is it ?understandable? for a mother to abuse the system for her daughter, the clear inference being it would not be understandable if a man did the same thing.

Just to stress the point, however, Diebel quotes political science professor Doreen Barrie saying, ?There are many issues here. Gender is one of them.?

Diebel writes of Barrie: ?She believes Redford may have been judged by a harsher standard than a male premier would have been.? So there it is. The poor, downtrodden, victimized woman.

Sure she wasted a lot of money and lived high off the hog at taxpayer's expense, but hey, she's a woman, a mother to boot, so apparently everybody should look the other way.

What utter nonsense.

Ontario voters will remember a recent premier by the name of Dalton McGuinty, a man who held sway in Ontario for most of this century to date. Yet during the recent provincial election, his successor ? a woman ? was never heard to utter his name.

He had retired in disgrace and, like almost every politician who has gone down that road, instantly became persona non grata among the party faithful.

It's nothing to do with gender. Nothing at all.

It's everything to do with performing, with keeping the party popular with the public. The minute you've lost the room ? or, in this case, the province ? is the minute you're ushered out the door.

It's just completely specious to claim it's because she is a woman. She was a disaster. Gender had nothing to do with her demise. Period.

