

National Affairs by Claire Hoy ? Time to leave Duffy alone

Politics, as everyone knows, is a dirty game; one which people enter at their peril. Particularly if they are Conservative, given the overwhelming small ?l? liberal bias of the media.

A case in point: Embattled Senator Mike Duffy.

During the two years leading up to the last election, Duffy bashing became a national sport in the media and among both Liberals and New Democrats.

Other Senators had been accused of inappropriate expenses as well ? and have been since the beginning of time. But it was Duffy, the former high-profile television journalist, who drew the most focus and, in the end, likely aided in the defeat of Stephen Harper. In the interest of full disclosure, let it be said that your humble correspondent has known ? and liked ? Duffy for about 40 years.

Why he accepted a Senate seat ? or why anybody actually gets into politics ? remains a mystery to me, but if you look at the saturation of media coverage of the Duffy ?scandal,? compared to the actual Mickey Mouse nature of the charges against him, you have to assume most of it was personal, aimed at both Duffy and Harper in equal shares.

Anybody who has the least passing knowledge of the Senate will know that the things Duffy was accused of doing, i.e. politicking for the prime minister who appointed him and bending the rules to suit his own circumstances, were all things that pretty well every senator has done forever.

People made much of the fact that Duffy was a senator representing Prince Edward Island, yet everyone knew he lived in Kanata, a suburb of Ottawa. This, we're told, was an ongoing outrage. Perhaps. But the Senate rules set out in the Constitution Act only state that to be eligible a person must own a small amount of property in the area he was picked to represent and he or she must be ?resident? of the province, which he was in the summer. Now you may want that rule to change ? which seems like a good idea to me ? but Duffy was far from the only senator who ?represented? a region of Canada but who actually lived in and around Ottawa. Duffy was also accused of making inappropriate expense claims, mainly of mixing up public business with the political business of the Tories. Oh please. I don't think there has been an election in my lifetime where a Liberal senator wasn't either the chair or co-chair of the Liberal election campaign, yet we didn't hear much of that. It was Duffy campaigning for the Tories that raised the ire of the self-righteous.

Again, if you think that's something senators shouldn't be doing, fair enough. But until they change the rules, senators will continue to use whatever clout they have to tout for the party that gave them the seat.

You will recall that Duffy was booted out of the Senate ? along with some others ? and his court case dragged on for the best part of two years. In the meantime, he lost out on his Senate pay and benefits ? some \$155,867.56 ? during that time of his suspension. He also spent 10s of thousands of dollars defending himself, at one point forced to take out a mortgage on his house to cover his legal costs.

In the end, however, Duffy was completely vindicated by Ontario Court Justice Charles Vaillancourt in April of 31 criminal charges. The judge said he hadn't broken any laws.

You would think ? or like to think ? that despite all the over-the-top coverage of this so-called ?scandal,? the fact that a court of law found nothing illegal in Duffy's actions would be enough to convince his fellow senators to accept the verdict of the courts and move on.

That would be expecting too much.

Not only will they not repay the money he lost during his suspension ? which it says here he should be entitled to recoup, given the not-guilty verdict ? they have now decided to come after him for almost \$17,000 in expense claims which they say were not ?appropriate.?

Duffy's lawyer, Donald Bayne ? making it clear his client has no intention of ponying up that money ? said the Senate's actions are ?a further compounding of injustice upon injustice (that) should be stopped.?

It certainly is.

They already dragged the guy through an unholy public circus ? harming both his financial and personal well-being ? and they lost their case. Leave the guy alone.

If they want to rewrite the Senate rules, by all means. But in the meantime, they should stop harassing Duffy and go back to whatever is they do in that place. Which, by the way, isn't much.

