

Silly season

By SHERALYN ROMAN

We're about to enter the 'silly season,' that time when politicians make promises, journalists call them to task and the general public? they want to curl up in the fetal position or bury their heads in the sand like an ostrich. All this in a futile effort to avoid the drama, nonsense and silliness of election season. In case you've forgotten as you drift along in your peaceful state of summer somnolence, an election is scheduled for October 21st, 2019 and the impact of this election will have far reaching consequences, the likes of which we haven't experienced in quite some time. In the words of a young adult I spoke with recently, 'with the number of old, racist, white men currently winning elections or already holding office across the country and around the world, I'm genuinely scared for our future.' We all should be.

Increasingly, we are seeing drastic changes in the makeup of our democracies. When men like Trump, Boris Johnston and Doug Ford are given power, immigrants, refugees and women have more to fear. The voiceless remain so and those to whom no voice should be given are shouting all the louder. We are seeing fewer and fewer women elected to higher office* and those that are, often harassed. We're going backwards. More and more young people are opting out of a system they see as corrupt and which does not reflect their demographic, their concerns or their interests. And yet 'if more and more young people opt out' what then? How do we elect representatives that aren't 'old and racist white guys' and instead send to office the well-educated, those concerned about the environment, the young men, women and non-binary adults who understand the issues and who, one hopes, will make better decisions because they (not the next generation or the one after that) will be directly impacted by climate change. (It's 100% real and we've got to change the narrative.)

To begin with, those same young adults MUST get out and vote. If my young adult friends truly feel (and I'm not convinced they're incorrect) that the old guard is leading us down a slippery slope toward a world where facism is real, feminism is being undermined at every turn and climate change is 'fake news,' then it's up to them to help change things. For as long as young folks feel disenfranchised and therefore decline to exercise their right to vote, 'old, racist white guys' will continue to vote in 'old, racist white guys.' It's time for adults young and old to turn silly season into a reason for politicians to 'up their game' and truly become accountable to their constituents 'every single one of them, regardless of race, creed, colour, sexual orientation or age.

Easier said than done. How do we encourage young folks to vote? To get involved? To fully participate in the democratic process? To begin, I think we must meet them where they are. On social media, in the universities and colleges, because these are the places and platforms on which young adults rely. At a partisan level too we need to do better. We need to encourage young people to get involved at the grassroots level. We must nurture, support and educate (regardless of political persuasion) young adults at every level by providing real and meaningful experiences in and outside of the party structure. We must invest in youth programming, education, providing tools and resources that promote equity for all and in particular for young women and for marginalized groups. During the 2018 municipal election I was encouraged to see that locally, a young adult was running for public school trustee. Engaged youth like this gentleman will, I sincerely hope, not only serve to encourage other youth to act similarly but to also help hold to account those more 'mature' candidates.

In the end, all of these are just words. Words from someone who is older and who, by nature of the colour of her skin, would be considered privileged. Why listen to me? I believe it's because we all have a role to play in encouraging the discouraged. If you believe in democracy, if you have faith, as Winston Churchill once said (and yes, I know he was an old white guy) 'that democracy is the worst form of Government except for all those other forms that have been tried from time to time,' then it remains up to each and every one of us to empower, encourage and enable young adults to get out there and exercise their democratic right to vote. Start now - hopefully by October our youth will be a force to be reckoned with and the likes of Trump, Johnston and Ford will fade into history, not make history.

*A recent article in Macleans by Anne Kingston provided jarring pictorial evidence of the change in the Canadian political landscape. For the first time since 2008 there are no women in a provincial leadership role.