

## Sleeping on the job ? and the ballot

by BROCK WEIR

Sleep and I have often had a love-hate relationship.

Don't get me wrong ? I fully recognize the importance of a good night's rest, and all the wonderful health benefits that come with it ? but in a day and age where time always seems to be at a premium, it sometimes feels that slumber can be a pesky, but necessary, inconvenience.

It's a feeling that lingers despite being fully aware of how good one feels after a really deep snore-fest.

Just a couple of weeks ago, for instance, at around 10.45 p.m. or so, I went into the bedroom to put some freshly-laundered sheets back on the bed before that evening's lights-out, which, at that point, wasn't planned for a few hours yet. After tucking in the hardest-to-reach corner, however, the next thing I knew it was 11 a.m. the next morning ? and thankfully that turned out to be a Sunday, so I didn't have anywhere special to be!

Before that point, I can't remember the last time I got more than a good eight hours of sleep, but I certainly did feel turbo-charged afterwards. I got so much accomplished on that particular Sunday, the only speed bump coming that evening when it was time to get ahead of the game for a busy Monday; I was completely wide awake well beyond midnight, which caused its own problems the next day.

One of these days, however, I'm confident I'll crack the code. As so many like to say, it's all about finding that balance. It's eluded me so far, but I won't give up.

My earliest days at our Aurora paper were something of a free-for-all in the quest for balance until I finally found my footing.

Duties at that time were a bit lighter as I was a reporter rather than an editor, and although my first editor here, Ron Wallace, rarely had any weekend assignments for me then, he also rarely ruled them out, so I had to keep on my toes.

Perhaps in a bad habit I picked up at university, my idea of balance those many years ago was blitzing through all the stories I had to write on Friday night, sometimes working through to the following morning's sunrise, sleeping for a few hours, and then having the rest of the weekend free for myself, family and friends.

It seemed like a good idea at the time, but this method proved itself to be unsustainable in the long-term, so the hunt for balance was back on. Such a balance was eventually found, but it needed some further tweaking once I succeeded Ron in 2011. But, still, every once in a while, some near-all-nighters are necessary.

Take election nights, for instance.

As someone with a healthy interest in politics, election nights always have their own special brand of excitement and much of that comes with uncertainty. If you think you know what your Election Day will entail when you wake up in the morning, you're wrong. There are too many variables. You might get all the results you need in quick order, but, more often than not, there are factors that can get in the way of an early night.

When the final day of the 2021 Federal Election campaign began, I couldn't have foreseen that my evening would conclude not only at 2 a.m., but in the kitchen of one of the victorious candidates, getting commentary on her successful bid for a seat in the House of Commons. A memorable evening, to be sure, but not ideal conditions to be fully functional the next day.

The most recent election ran along similar timelines ? but for different reasons.

The results came in quickly for many of the ridings in which our newspapers operate ? bar a later-than-expected count in Brampton North-Caledon ? so I was home shortly after midnight, but it was still several hours before I turned in?but only after giving up hope hearing the final results in the riding of Carleton in real-time before my personal gas tank ran dry.

As we know, that was the long-held riding of Conservative leader Pierre Poilievre, and, as it turned out, he ultimately lost his own election to Liberal candidate Bruce Fanjoy, who sealed the deal due to a long and successful ground game and, as some would argue, because there were a whopping 91 candidates on the ballot.

The riding was targeted by the Longest Ballot Committee, an activist movement that has been advocating for significant electoral reform across the country since its foundation in 2019.

Critics of the move to have an eye-watering number of names on the ballot say their efforts were deliberately targeting Poilievre ? and, of course they were ? but aside from raising the profile of their activist organization, their efforts were rather inconsequential.

Fanjoy, for instance, received an impressive 43,846 votes, coming ahead of Poilievre, who garnered 39,333 votes. Looking solely at the independent candidates in the race ? that is, those who declined to state any party affiliation ? the grand total failed to crack 1,000 votes, so whatever the mission, I don't think it was quite accomplished. Nor can it be attributed to the leader's eventual loss.

The real victory may just have been all those who took the time to learn the Latin alphabet at their earliest opportunity and knew where they could find their candidate of choice on the lengthy ballot!

Now, as the Conservative leader vies for another seat in the House of Commons in the upcoming byelection in the Alberta riding of Battle River-Crowfoot, the Longest Ballot Committee is at it again ? and, at press time, had long exceeded their record with more than 200 candidates signed up.

Elections Canada announced Monday that due to the sheer number of candidates on the ballot, the traditional ballots in which each candidate is listed alphabetically will be replaced with one in which voters will be able to write in the name of their candidate of choice.

So much for the impact of seeing another eye-watering list of candidates, protestors, rabble-rousers, or however you want to define them!

In their quest for the longest ballot, it seems as though their real objective of opposing the idea that ?politicians shouldn't be in charge of their own ethics and election rules? and doing away with Canada's long-held first-past-the-post electoral system are getting lost in the noise ? no matter how warranted their concerns might be. And there is always a conversation to be had on these subjects.

The chances of a substantive talk about these issues happening before the voters of Battle River-Crowfoot have their pencils in hand are, in my opinion, slim ? so, it will be interesting to see what these Canadians do next to keep the conversation going.

In the meantime, given the current state of politics in Alberta, I'd wager the chances of anyone but Poilievre carrying the day are similarly lithe ? so, regardless of your political leanings, I think we can all be grateful we probably won't have to pull another all-nighter for this race's thrilling conclusion!