

Spurring action and fostering momentum

BROCK'S BANTER

By Brock Weir

Canadians went to the polls two months ago.

As we all know, in the 30 days leading up to the election itself, very distinct visions of Canada were offered to voters. Promises were made, some previous promises were revived, reheated, rehashed and repackaged for another round of evaluation by the Canadian people. Yet, at the end of the day, for better or worse, not a lot changed in the House of Commons.

We're still in a Minority Parliament situation where politicians and those who thrive on Canadian politics are on tenterhooks waiting for this particular house of cards to fall at any moment, there are a few new faces and voices to add to the mix, and the balance of power is much the same.

With the platform and promises of Justin Trudeau still fresh in our minds, last week's Throne Speech seemed like it was going to be little more than political theatre in that there would be a lot of dash and flash, but nothing really new that we could sink our teeth into.

The biggest variable this time around, however, seemed to be a new Governor General to read out the speech on the Queen's behalf, a Vice Regal representative who, rather than treating it like a burden that was forced onto her shoulders keeping her from something more exciting to do, seems to have a respect and appreciation for her office and the person and the people she represents.

And, as a variable, she delivered.

It was clear when Mary May Simon rolled up to the temporary Senate building across the road from Parliament Hill, with the Order of Canada around her neck framed by highlights of purple in her hair, that this is not a Governor General content to simply go through the motions or keep the throne warm.

While it is generally understood that the Throne Speech is delivered on behalf of the Federal Government, its words crafted behind the scenes to reflect the mandate given to it by the people of Canada, there is some wiggle room at the bookends on either side of the legislative meat for the Governor General to add some thoughts of her own.

Given that Ms. May Simon is our country's first Indigenous Governor General, words on the ongoing and horrific discoveries of unmarked graves associated with Residential Schools would have a very personal tone and wouldn't be simple platitudes intended to check the needs-to-be-saids off a list before moving onto the legislative program ahead.

Also given the fact that British Columbia is going through some of the most demonstrable and undeniable effects of climate change yet seen in this country, there was a lot to go over that couldn't be glossed over.

"We cannot hide from these discoveries; they open deep wounds," she said, referring to the Residential School tragedy. "Despite the profound pain there is hope. Already we have seen how Canadians are committed to reconciliation. Indigenous Peoples are reclaiming our history, stories, culture and language through action. Non-Indigenous Peoples are coming to understand and accept the true impact of the past and the pain suffered by generations of Indigenous Peoples. Together, they are walking the path towards reconciliation. We must turn the guilt we carry into action: Action on reconciliation. Action on our collective health and wellbeing. Action on climate change. Our Earth is in danger. From a warming Arctic to increasing devastation of natural disasters, our land and our people need help. We must move talk into action, and adapt where we must. We cannot afford to wait."

As you begin this 44th Parliament of Canada, and as we recover from the effects of the pandemic and build a better relationship between Indigenous Peoples and non-Indigenous peoples, I urge you to transform discussion into concrete results for us and our country. Listen to the diverse voices who speak a multitude of languages and who shape this country. Confronting the hard questions will not always be easy or comfortable and it will require conviction but it is necessary. The outcome will be a sustainable, united Canada for you, for me, for our children, and for every generation to come.

Some of the Government's plan to address these issues were highlighted, including a renewed Anti-Racism strategy in an effort to stand up for diversity and inclusion.

Canadians understand that equity, justice, and diversity are the means and the ends to living together, the Governor General continued, reading the Government's road map for the Parliamentary session. Fighting systemic racism, sexism, discrimination, misconduct, and abuse, including in our core institutions will remain a key priority. This is a moment to rebuild for everyone. The government will continue to invest in the empowerment of Black and racialized Canadians, and Indigenous Peoples. It will also continue to fight harmful content online and stand up for LGBTQ2 communities while completing the ban on conversion therapy.

Laudable moves all, and not a small-time goal by any stretch of the imagination; fighting systemic racism, sexism, discrimination, misconduct, and more is long overdue, especially from the Federal government and many of the areas that fall under its expansive umbrella.

But what I would like to see is what the Federal Government will do to support grassroots solutions to these factors that hold us collectively back.

That is not to say a top-down approach isn't welcomed; of course, it is. Change must always come from the top, but change from the top, as our history has shown us, is slow-going.

Since the National Commission on Truth & Reconciliation offered its 94 Calls to Action, many community groups and individuals here at home and across the country took it upon themselves to review them, compile a shortlist of which ones they could accomplish, and bring determined volunteers together to make a difference.

Municipalities have also done a lot of work on the same front.

Additionally, more recently, we have seen community associations spring up to spur concrete action on addressing systemic racism and discrimination, including driving customers to businesses owned by members of racialized communities, in order to make a real difference.

Community members, including grassroots leaders, should be commended for doing their level best to try and fill gaps in leadership and they should be recognized, including support from the top to continue the momentum they fostered while many of the powers-that-be wrung their hands.