

Tall orders in power vacuums

by BROCK WEIR

As the dawn of a new year approaches, a particular tradition in my family is to pause during the Christmas hubbub and tune into the King's Christmas Message as both a time for calm and a source of inspiration for the year ahead.

These messages are one of the rare instances where the Monarch speaks from their heart in a speech that is not drafted by any of the 14 governments that share the same King, giving us a unique insight as to what makes them tick, and what's inspired them over the previous 12 months, through a non-partisan lens.

Given this lack of politics, there are usually pearls of wisdom that set the tone for ? and remind us of where we might want to be ? in the year ahead.

This year was no exception. The King spoke of his pride of being with Commonwealth veterans this past spring to mark the 80th anniversary of D-Day.

?Their example of service and selflessness continues to inspire, across the generations,? said the King. ?During previous commemorations, we were able to console ourselves with the thought that these tragic events seldom happen in the modern era. But, on this Christmas Day, we cannot help but think of those for whom the devastating effects of conflict ? in the Middle East, in Central Europe, in Africa, and elsewhere ? pose a daily threat to so many people's lives and livelihoods. We also think of the humanitarian organizations working tirelessly to bring vital relief.

?All of us go through some form of suffering at some stage in our life, be it mental or physical. The degree to which we help one another ? and draw support from each other, be we people of faith or of none ? is a measure of our civilization as Nations. That is what continually impresses me, as my family and I meet with, and listen to, those who dedicate their lives to helping others?

?On our recent visit to the South Pacific to attend the Commonwealth Summit, I was reminded constantly of the strength which institutions, as well as individuals, can draw from one another. And how diversity of culture, ethnicity, and Faith provides strength, not weakness. Across the Commonwealth, we are held together by a willingness to listen to each other, to learn from one another, and to find just how much we have in common. Because, through listening, we learn to respect our differences, to defeat prejudice, and to open up new possibilities.?

We are lucky to come from communities where the tireless work of so many to improve the lives of their neighbours and to better their streets, neighbourhoods, and the towns they call home better places to live, work and play, are routinely underscored, recognized, and celebrated. The best part is that these people rarely do any of their good deeds for the kudos, but they are bestowed nonetheless.

Yet, at the same time, when we look beyond our local communities to the province and the country, the principles of learning from one another, finding our commonalities, and listening to what others have to say ? so long as there is no harm intended or done ? to gain perspective are often left by the wayside due to partisan games. And there is certainly little effort to build something special from a foundational common ground.

Monday's announcement by Justin Trudeau of his intention to resign as Prime Minister and leader of the Liberal Party as soon as his successor is chosen by party faithful was timely in underscoring this as well.

Given the pre-Christmas resignation of Finance Minister and Deputy Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland, Monday's announcement really comes as no surprise as pressure mounted on Trudeau from all parts of this country to step aside and make way for either a leadership contest, a Federal election, or an unwieldy combination of both.

The timing, however, had something of the surprise element as the writing has been on the wall for Trudeau ever since the party lost the June 24 by-election in the riding of Toronto-St. Paul's, a win which should have been a slam-dunk for the governing Liberals in almost any other circumstance.

Many pundits described the race, not inaccurately, as a review of Trudeau's leadership as much as it was a bout between the Liberals' Leslie Church, the NDP's Amrit Parhar, and ultimate Conservative victor Don Stewart.

The results being what they were, and polls being what they were and continue to be, it was confounding that Trudeau chose to stay in place for a further six months and counting until the resignation of his long-time Deputy and one of his most staunch defenders called it a day on her cabinet points, sending a pointed message to the leader while doing so, shaking the party to its core.

Now, with Monday's decision to prorogue parliament, kick off a Liberal leadership contest, and resign, we're left with a power vacuum as the first pages of an extremely challenging chapter of our political history start to be written.

Having a leadership vacuum as a new U.S. administration takes place is best avoided under the best of circumstance, but these circumstances are nothing to write home about ? and could have been avoided had common sense ? in the broadest of terms, not how any one party defines it ? prevailed.

Now, here we are ? not only facing tariff threats that will be nothing short of crippling for Canada should they transpire as proposed, but also facing increasingly audacious, unthinkable and downright ridiculous suggestions and taunts from the incoming President that our nation become the 51st state of the union. Statements from the new Finance Minister Dominic LeBlanc, who was present with Trudeau at the Mar-a-Lago event where the suggestion was first made, stating that it was merely a joke from the once-and-future leader certainly don't inspire confidence and suggest he's learned nothing about how this man operates from his first go-round.

So, where does that leave us?

Well, one inevitability that seems to be coming out of this mess is there will need to be a lot of soul-searching in Canada this year on what constitutes the kind of country we are, the kind of country we want to be, and, essentially, who we are as people in order to make that happen.

As the King suggested, a ?willingness to listen to each other, to learn from one another, and to find out just how much we have in common?[to] learn to respect our differences, to defeat prejudice, and to open up new possibilities? is a good start.

It might be a tall order, it might be a very basic blueprint, but taking the advice of our Head of State certainly couldn't hurt!