

We get the politicians we deserve

By Brian Lockhart

During a recent trip to Italy, former U.S. President Barack Obama made the statement: "You get the politicians you deserve." He followed up that comment by stating, "If you don't vote and you don't participate and you don't pay attention, then you'll get policies that don't reflect your interests."

While that does seem to make good sense off the top, there is a gaping hole in the logic that you "get policies that don't reflect your interests."

I have voted in every municipal, provincial and federal election, except for one, since I have been eligible to vote.

I can't remember why I didn't bother to vote in that one election many years ago, but the next day I regretted not exercising my right as a citizen and have never missed another vote.

The hole in the logic is that even if you do vote, you still may not get the policies that reflect your interests. Just because you do participate and cast a ballot it doesn't mean your voice will be heard. If your candidate doesn't win the election, don't expect your interests to be noted at the next sitting of Parliament.

A government should reflect the wishes of its citizens - all of them, not just the majority.

Therein lies a failure of democracy.

Even if a government is elected by a majority of 51 per cent, that means almost half of the population won't "get the policies that reflect their interests."

What Obama is really saying is that a vote for the "other guy" means you don't deserve to have your voice heard if your candidate doesn't win an election.

The U.S. claims to be a republic. The truth is it hasn't been a republic for more than 200 years.

The role of government in a republic is to apply the rule of law - not the rule of a majority.

The U.S. shifted from a republic to a democracy and no one noticed. In fact, nowhere in the U.S. constitution or any State constitution does the word "democracy" even appear.

Nowhere is majority rule defined more openly than in the House of Commons in Ottawa.

Those with the majority of seats make the rules and the rest of them are relegated to being nothing more than critics.

Have you ever heard of a sitting prime minister - or any other government member - suddenly having an epiphany and declaring that an opposition critic is actually right about an issue?

It doesn't happen - even if they are right - because the partisan nature of politics will not allow a party member to agree with an opposing member of parliament.

If the party holding the majority of seats has decided to enact legislation, they will do it, regardless of the fact that there is opposition elsewhere.

You can call your MP and demand action on the behalf of the constituents in your riding, but if your member of parliament isn't a member of the ruling party, your voice will be lost in the wilderness.

How many times have opinion polls shown that a majority of Canadians are opposed to a government plan and yet the government forges ahead and enacts legislation or carries out the plan in spite of what the population wants? That's majority rule.

I have no empathy for those that don't vote, then complain about government policies. The vote is, at the very least, your one opportunity to state an opinion on which direction a government should take.

It should not be the function of elected officials to follow the plan of the majority only. It is their mandate to represent all people in their constituency - not just members of the party or those known to vote for a certain party.

While Obama's comments seem fairly innocuous on the surface, the undertones certainly are a dig at his successor.

If Obama had listened to all the people during his tenure as he was supposed to, and as every other president should have, the current political situation in the U.S. might be entirely different.