

## Working ?Holidays?

by BROCK WEIR

We probably all had to get up in front of the classroom at one point or another to yammer on about what we did on our summer vacations. With the school year in full swing, I'm curious as to how some of the younger kids these days might answer the question.

My go-to answer, as I have written before in this space, was usually a few highlights of the day camps that were ubiquitous in my childhood. Vacations to exotic locales, beyond the odd grocery trip to upstate New York when our dollar allowed for such extravagances, were rare ? well, until we found a yearly event close to our former grocery stomping grounds ? so I'm sure my audience was bored before too long.

It's a shame we didn't keep up these ice-breaking exercises in high school and university though because, by that point, there were far more interesting things for me to talk about.

After my first year at Carleton was in the books, some of the job opportunities here at home frowned on the idea of a student who was headed back to Ottawa in just a couple of months, so I took on some volunteer opportunities that were of interest and, most importantly, fulfilling.

The first gig was a bit of a bust for reasons which are still unclear to me ? everything seemed perfect on paper ? but the second turned out to be something of a game-changer.

This opportunity brought me in touch for the first time with my local Member of Parliament and their enthusiastic and effective constituency team.

Striking up a conversation, the chance to be a volunteer in the Member's Ottawa office while school was in session came up and, as it happened, the chance to carry on many of the same responsibilities, with a few extra thrown in for good measure, as a Summer Student at the constituency level as well.

In the school year that followed back in Ottawa, and then back at home, I was able to not only conduct research, but also do some writing, and handle case files on subjects as varied as immigration to taxes. I was also able to see what MPs really do on their ?summer vacation.?

It was a jam-packed program of community events, advocacy, meeting with hundreds of residents one-on-one to hear their concerns, find solutions, and simply listen.

There was, at least from my vantage point, precious little time to turn off. While it was not the day-to-day House of Commons stuff that is normally front and centre in our consciousness, like Question Period, work nevertheless continued ? and sometimes at a pace that was difficult to follow.

Much has been said in recent months about the amount of time MPs have had ?off? this year away from the House of Commons, amid the transition from the Trudeau to Carney governments. There is an idea that MPs have spent the dog days of summer ? and, let's be frank, the early part of the season and spring as well ? sitting with their feet up while our country faces one existential crisis after another.

That is far from reality, as the number of times you've seen your MP this summer can probably attest. That being said, however, it was nice to see our Federal representatives back in their seats Monday, back at work, back to holding each other to account, in the heart of our nation's capital.

We are living in a time of great uncertainty, and seeing the people who, in so many respects, hold our futures in their hands back at it, is somewhat reassuring ? as was the first verbal sparring match on Monday afternoon as Opposition Leader Pierre Poilievre posed his questions to Prime Minister Mark Carney.

Returned to the House of Commons by Alberta voters in a by-election earlier this summer ? hey, that would have made for one heck of a ?How I Spent My Summer Vacation? essay ? after being rejected by voters in his long-time Ottawa-area constituency in the Spring federal election, Poilievre was back in from the cold.

Whether you agree with his policies and rhetoric or not, it's a value-added to have a fully-functional Opposition in place to hold the government to account after a haphazard, occasionally gaffe-prone, and occasionally aimless-feeling attempt to lead the Opposition without a voice in Parliament.

After all, our democracy is only as strong as all its constituent components.

Carney and Poilievre's first meeting in the House as leaders of the Government and Opposition at the start of the week was collegial, sometimes funny, often pointed ? but functional. So far.

Mind you, I'm under no illusions that this collegiality and good humour will continue? well, until the time you read this, but a good start is a good start. Let's hope that partisanship for the sake of partisanship can take a backseat for the greater good at this unprecedented time.

The challenge of leading a party, whether in the role as Leader of the Opposition, or simply the leader of an opposing party, without being able to be a strong legislative voice in the places where decisions are made has been recently evidenced by former Mississauga mayor Bonnie Crombie, whose term as leader of the Ontario Liberals is now wrapping up.

Despite surviving a leadership review contest this past weekend as Provincial Liberals gathered in Toronto, Crombie felt her 21 months of somewhat successfully rebuilding the Liberals while leading it without a voice in the legislature, had come to an end.

?I looked out at our audience today and thought about all the conversations I've had over the last few days,? she said in a statement on Sunday evening. ?Passionate conversations. Hopeful conversations. Conversations with Ontario Liberals who see that the future of this province is bright and who are ready to make sure it happens with us in the driver's seat.

?I want to do everything I can to ensure that opportunity is not impeded by any one person. This is more important than ego. This is more important than ambition. This is about the very thing that unites us all?. Even though I received a majority of support from delegates, I believe it is the best decision for the Ontario Liberal Party to facilitate an orderly transition towards a leadership vote. I have advised the party president of my decision to resign upon the selection of my successor.?

It is a bold decision. Only time will tell whether it was the correct one for the Liberals, but it sure is an opportunity ? to look within, to examine the voices they have at the table, and look for someone who will be able to hit the ground running and go toe to toe with Doug Ford and Marit Stiles, without having to wait for a byelection or general election to make it happen.

Whoever it might be will have an interesting tale to tell next summer as they spend that time trying to win the hearts and minds of Ontarians.