

Holding hands instead of clenching fists

MARK PAVILONS

It's disheartening that in this current age of instant enlightenment, messages and facts are still somewhat skewed.

We're constantly bombarded by news clips and snippets, claiming the Province is heading into the abyss, slicing and dicing our social fabric. We hear about union unrest, outcries from teachers and students, and health practitioners warning of the end to health care as we know it.

Who's telling the truth, and who's tailoring the facts to suit their needs?

I've been at the journalism game for more than 30 years, so I've picked up a few things along the way. Some may help clear the air, others may keep things murky, but here you go.

In my opinion, any government in power has good intentions. In our democracy, it does no good to step into power and unplug the life support to our amazing system that boasts high standards in health care and education. Our premier and MPPs are not evil ??they got into politics with the same intentions as all others ? to do good and make a difference.

I firmly believe that.

Another fact is that politicians and ministers surround themselves with experts ? intelligent professionals who know how to get things done.

These scientists, medical experts, educators, engineers, architects, legal experts and number crunchers all have an area of expertise, and can give sound advice and recommendations.

So when the government says they're cutting back here, giving there, and creating new funding way over there, it's not done out of malice or retribution. It's often done out of necessity, and of course, sometimes to give into public opinion.

The citizens of Ontario overwhelmingly elected this PC?provincial government on its declared mandate, plans, projects and promises. Nothing that's been done in recent months should come as a surprise to anyone who was paying attention.

Over the past few decades, our bureaucracy has grown exponentially, to the point where it's quite unmanageable. It is a tangled web that we've woven to create a very expensive system that caters to almost every need and desire. We can't keep writing blank cheques for every social issue, every sad case, every citizen's wants. It's too expensive.

Just 10 years ago, regional budgets of \$1 billion were unheard of. I watched as municipalities and regional governments grew, but I never in a million years thought budgets would top \$1 billion. Even 20 years ago, membership in the ?century club??as it was known (civil servants earning \$100K?a year), was in the hundreds. Today it's in the tens of thousands. The PCs have noted that almost half of the annual provincial budget consists of salaries!

With that unfathomable burden, how are we supposed to get anything done with what's left over? How are we to build roads, hospitals, fund education and keep our water clean when we are at the mercy of teachers' unions, iron clad contracts, legislated pay increases and indexed pensions?

There's no question, and they will all agree, that most of our civil servants (teachers included)?have the sweetest deal on the planet. Poland just went through some turmoil over teachers' salaries. Teachers' average net monthly earnings range between 1,800 zlotys and 3,000 zlotys (\$470 to \$780.) They get some additional pay for being in charge of a specific class.

Data released by the OECD reveals that Canadian teachers are the third highest paid in the world, next only to Germany and Luxembourg.

Full day learning (or free babysitting as I like to call it) was brought in by the Wynne Liberals only a decade ago. This costs us \$1 billion annually for a vote-getting, social service. It decimated the private day care industry. I can tell you dozens other things I'd rather see this money go to each and every year. Maybe building a few hospitals; fixing the Gardiner; extending the subway to the North Pole!

King-Vaughan MPP?Stephen Lecce said something recently that caught my attention. In reference to the battle over the carbon tax, Lecce said the feds prefer to ?pick a fight instead of picking up a shovel.? And there's the crux of the matter.

Opposition politicians are just that ? they oppose everything the government does, whether or not it's valid or makes sense. Unions are often at odds with any mention of government cutbacks or savings. Every social service organization cries foul when the government hints at clawbacks. It seems that people prefer to fight, rather than take a seat at the table and hash things out.

Most of us know there's give and take in our relationships, in our home lives and with our children. It continues at our jobs.

Cordiality works when expecting good service at a restaurant and we all know full well that being amenable is far better than being

confrontational.

So what gives, people?

Is it that we all have vested interests and all we care about is our bread being properly buttered??Are we always looking out for number one, and damn the rest of them?

Governments routinely announce new funding prior to elections, to buy votes. And we eat it up. An increase in the child tax credit??Whoopee! Where's the money coming from??Our own pay cheques!?Boo!

Most of us also have a pretty good handle on our household expenses and since we've just done our income taxes, we're quite familiar with some of the realities. We know exactly what we need to pay our mortgage, grocery bills, cable and Internet, gas, and kids' stuff.

If our children threatened to strike, demanding double the allowance, what do we tell them??If our Internet provider doubled its rates, what would we do??If the price of celery rises to \$6 do we simply absorb it?

No. We cut back.?We look for a better deal. We switch providers.

The Province doesn't have that luxury. But it does control the purse strings and sometimes they have to say no.

There's only so much to go around, and there's only one set of taxpayers to draw upon.

What are you going to do when your take-home pay continues to shrink and prices continue to rise? Who are you going to blame?

