

Are we just too busy to care about democracy?

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Being blessed can have its disadvantages.

Being a Canadian, with all of its remarkable benefits, comes with a bit of a price.

And that price is apathy. Perhaps not total apathy, but a reliance, a belief, that others are working around the clock in our best interests and protecting us from doom.

Author Marina Nemat, who was imprisoned in her native Iran as a teenager for speaking out against the government, put it best: We choose a government, put it in place and then go home and pay our mortgage. Our politicians are given money, power and responsibilities and we are surprised when things go wrong. We're just too busy working and arguing with our teenage children. She's quite right.

Today, we are so caught up with our lives ? and the constant demands of running our households and our families ? that everything else is much lower on our list of priorities.

Canadians are currently burdened with the highest personal debt in history. House prices are at record levels. Cost of living continues to rise. Stress levels are taking their toll and our health is suffering.

So, who has time for politics or trying to make a difference?

We all should.

A world-leading expert on climate change, Hans Martin, is also frustrated with our current system and our inaction on the environment. We're educated and have amassed a ton of evidence on the effects of climate change and environmental toxins, and yet our political leaders seem to be preoccupied with other matters.

And by extension, so are we, for not pushing them and holding them accountable.

Martin points to a lack of encouragement of our young bright minds ? our future generations. We have some very talented young people, but our education system and society doesn't really foster excellence. Our youth spend more time on their electronic devices and likely never set foot in a library. They know little about world history or world politics.

It's evident in our current TV programming here in North America. Flip on the tube and you'll find a multitude of reality shows, sitcoms and game shows, but little in the way of educational programs.

Martin put it very well:

'It seems we've given it all up for hamburgers, football and air conditioning.'

How sad is that?

Again, it may not be apathy, but it's a gradual, continual, dumbing down of our citizenry, and a gentle erosion of democratic principles.

Nemat is passionate when she says democracy needs to be nurtured and maintained and it's very fragile.

In King, I believe the residents have a pretty good handle on things ??voter turnout is strong during elections; citizen's groups are active; residents attend council and public meetings; volunteers are strong, and we do promote a green way of life.

Perhaps our residents are blessed with time and a different set of priorities.

But the majority in our midst do have to worry about their mortgage payments and sending their kids to college or university. We have to worry about car insurance rates and the price of gas.

I have found that new Canadians are the most passionate about our way of life and our democratic system.

My dad escaped his native Latvia at the end of the Second World War, fearing occupation by the Russians. Some of his relatives weren't so lucky, and endured decades of communist rule.

I recall seeing letters he wrote to his family, returned by the Soviet government, with heavy black lines through every other sentence. Any positive comments about life in the west were banned. He was prevented from properly communicating with his relatives.

His distaste for the Iron Curtain fueled his passion for democracy. He was proud to be a Canadian citizen and not only read the papers constantly, he voted without fail, and always voiced his opinion.

Many Europeans who flocked to Toronto in the 1950s and '60s settled in Roncesvalles, an area that flourished with a multicultural flavour. It was like representatives from every country in the world gathered to celebrate their new home and newfound democratic freedoms.

While those strong European work ethics were passed on, I think subsequent generations of Canadians have become less interested in current events, international affairs and politics in general. The media tends to focus on the wrongdoings of our politicians and senators, further perpetuating the belief that our system is broken or corrupt.

While the media does have an important role to play as watchdog, encouraging accountability, our system is fragile and requires, as Nemat noted, regular maintenance. She said it's as delicate and fleeting as holding water in your hands.

We regularly service our vehicles, have regular health checkups and even take our pets to the vet. Does democracy deserve any less?

During our family chats or discussions around the dinner table, do we mention political events, or important happenings? Granted, it's not everyone's cup of tea, but if our teenagers are to become the next world leaders, we need to foster engagement and political awareness.

My 15-year-old often wonders why a massive bureaucracy is even necessary. I explain the intricacies of our system, and the responsibilities of all levels of government, but she's continually shocked by the huge spending and lack of efficiency.

Out of the mouths of babes.

Regardless of the current state of our system, it's fundamental to our country's operation and evolution.

Our bureaucracy may be bloated, but that too, is our fault.

As the flood waters rise to our waists, isn't it time to take stock and examine what's really important?

Politicians answer to the electorate. It's never too late, or never the wrong time, to remind them of that fact.

We need to set examples for our young, so they become the guardians of our democratic system and the very planet we call home.