

Protest candidates make fun of the process

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As the municipal election campaign gears up in earnest, perhaps it's time to take a light-hearted approach to our political system. We are quite lucky here in Canada, where our rules, party structure and tiered system is fairly easy to understand. It's open and accessible and pretty much anyone can take an active role in helping to shape our community, province and nation. Our regional and municipal representatives are in the thick of an election, some trying to retain their seats; others trying to enter the political arena.

I ran for regional councillor in Bolton in the 2010 election and finished second in a four-person race, garnering just over 1,500 votes. It was quite an experience and I enjoyed every minute of it. It was exciting, invigorating and a heck of a learning experience. I admit I was a bit naive, believing that a local journalist, with a solid grasp of the system and the community, with no personal agenda, could make a difference. There's a lot more than meets the eye in local political campaigns!

People in my community are still asking whether I'd consider running for a second time. Given my newspaper position, it's a tricky situation and I'd have to take a leave of absence to mount a campaign.

Watching things unfold in King has been quiet interesting. I've witnessed the first full term of the current council, under Mayor Steve Pellegrini. Not being around prior to the 2010 election, I can only comment on what I've seen since. I'm quite impressed with the current batch of representatives and I've gotten to know most of them on a personal level, as well as a professional one. All good people.

But being a decent person with good intentions isn't always enough. There are always others waiting in the wings to toss their hat in the ring and make a race of it. And why not?

Our system not only allows for public engagement, it encourages it. The more the merrier.

I believe people of all ages need to take a more active interest in what's happening in their own backyards. And seeking municipal office is, in my opinion, the epitome of local involvement. It's often a thankless task and some believe it's a position that comes with power, prestige and perks. Well, as far as smaller municipalities like King are concerned, the rewards are in the service itself.

But the bottom line is I salute everyone who is running, and considering it, for putting themselves on the line for their fellow men and women, in the hopes of making their community a better place.

Politics is a rather odd and often strange line of work.

In some places, protest votes come in many wild ways. While Canadian examples are rare, many countries around the world allow non-human candidates, write-in votes and the like, just so people can have their say. Hey, democracy is fair, but no one said voters have to be playing with a full deck!

Often, the candidacies are a means of satirizing the political system or just for the fun of it.

Electoral regulations may require candidates to be human (or equivalent wording), or may require candidates to do things which animals cannot reasonably do (such as sign their name on a legal form). On some occasions, however, animals have been accepted

as candidates, and have even won office.

Tuxedo Stan, a cat from Halifax, Nova Scotia, was a mayoral candidate in the 2012 municipal election, representing the Tuxedo Party, a political movement aimed to improve the welfare of felines in Halifax Regional Municipality.

Does anyone remember the late-night talk show hosted by a sock? Ed the Sock, a crude, cigar-smoking gym sock puppet, attempted to run for the 'Fed-Up Party' during the Canadian federal election, 2011. You may remember this 1990s cult star for his Ed's Night Party talk show. Apparently you can still catch him on podcasts or YouTube and he still makes public appearances. Ed's creator and voice talent Steven Kerzner did have a successful stint at school board trustee and provincial candidate.

A dog beat out a store owner to be elected the mayor of Cormorant, Minnesota recently.

In 2001, a Dachshund called 'Sausage' was a candidate for Marseille (France) municipal elections. He won 4% of the votes.

In 2006, a famous prankster and street artist from Szeged, Hungary, proclaimed himself the founder of the Hungarian Double-tailed Dog Party, going as far as to place propaganda ads out on the walls of houses, promoting the candidate 'István Nagy, a two-tailed dog.'

Molly the Dog, a dachshund from Oklahoma, was named as a candidate in the 2008 U.S. presidential election.

United States TV host and California council member Charlotte Laws had a chicken who ran for vice-president on the Bully ticket in the 2012 election.

The Inanimate Objects Party at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute encourages write-in votes for inanimate objects, such as an inflatable whale named Arthur Galpin or a dead albino squirrel.

Hank the Cat, a Maine Coon from Northern Virginia, ran against Tim Kaine and George Allen for Virginia's senate seat in 2012. He earned third place in the state, with nearly 7,000 votes!

Several animals in the US have been elected mayors of small towns such as Rabbit Hash, Kentucky, whose mayor is a black lab named Junior Cochran, and Lajitas, Texas, whose mayor is a beer-drinking goat named Clay Henry III. Both Rabbit Hash and Lajitas are unincorporated towns where the mayoralty is purely a ceremonial position, not an actual leader of government.

I have two very nice yellow labs 'Marley and Lola' who would make fine additions to any township. They are great with people, always listen, enjoy public events, fundraising dinners and support the environment. They may have an odd way of greeting people and other four-legged constituents, they are honest and loyal.

What more could you ask for?

Good luck at the polls this fall!