

Democracy is the best system we have

By Mark Pavilons

The people have spoken.

This pretty much sums up the fundamentals of our democratic system in a nutshell. Sure, our form of government may not be perfect, but it's the very foundation of our society.

Often, when you toss out the term 'politics,' people shudder and make some weird facial distortions. Politics isn't everyone's cup of tea, but politics permeates every aspect of our society, whether we realize it or not.

In Canada, we enjoy universal health care and education -- both political decisions and two very important cornerstones of our political system. We take them for granted. Sure, we expect to be treated well and expeditiously and often complain when the system hits a few hurdles, or we're left waiting for a few hours for emergency care. I'd like to remind people that we have one of the best health care systems in the world and our hospitals in the GTA are among the finest anywhere on the planet.

People die every day across the globe due to a lack of access to a doctor. Children perish from illnesses that we've cured in the west decades ago.

We have a pretty good public education system in this province. From kindergarten to Grade 12, our children are given a really good start in life. They have access to not only quality education, but a vast array of extra-curricular activities that improve their health, fitness and social skills.

There is assistance for those who need money for post-secondary studies, through OSAP. Recent changes have postponed repayment for students until they are settled, earning a decent salary.

We also have some of the finest colleges and universities around.

Our tax dollars -- income taxes, sales taxes, property taxes -- go to pay for garbage collection, roads, police and fire protection, to name a few. All of this just happens to be part of our political system, at all three levels.

People are often heard to remark 'there's nothing we can do to change things.' That can't be further from the truth.

The recent U.S. election is proof of that. People wanted change. They sent a strong message to the 'establishment' that they were not happy with the way things were. A strong voter turnout proves just how effective, and in this case, dramatic, democracy can be.

For all those who said they couldn't make a difference, well look at how they've effectively changed the political landscape in America!

And, believe it or not, we all have a say. We can voice our opinions and concerns any time, to our local councillors, provincial MPPs or federal MPs. They are our pipeline to the government and ruling party. We can affect change. Simply by standing up, making our concerns known, we can not only provide input into our own communities, but perhaps right some wrongs along the way.

While the term 'politics' can be daunting, confusing and intimidating, it shouldn't be. It was never meant to be when our founding fathers created our system. Our humble beginnings were ground-up -- from the people, by the people.

I can't stress this enough. The words from the U.S. Constitution are so powerful -- 'We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.'

Nothing is so simple and eloquent.

Our relatively new Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1982) is equally powerful. It sets out our fundamental rights and freedoms that include (a) freedom of conscience and religion; (b) freedom of thought, belief, opinion and expression, including freedom of the press and other media of communication; (c) freedom of peaceful assembly; and (d) freedom of association. It also guarantees democratic, mobility, legal and equality rights.

Boiled down, politics means democratic rights. A lot of time and effort went into these founding documents.

Okay, growing up a free society we tend to take it all for granted. But I'd like to remind everyone that Canada was founded by European immigrants and an influx of displaced persons after the Second World War jump-started our current way of life.

My father held democratic freedoms very dearly, since he left a country that fell under the Communist boot. He made it a point of taking an interest in, and voting in, every election here in Canada. He never missed one.

We just marked Remembrance Day and hopefully we all stopped and reflected on the sacrifices that allow us to enjoy our freedoms today. I take out an MIA letter about my uncle from time to time, just to remind me how real it all was.

I would like to remind everyone, young and old alike, not to fear the word 'politics.' Embrace it, understand it and get involved.

Our system belongs to us, thanks to all those who came before, to make this land blessed with liberty and prosperity. Never take that

for granted!