

Look past the negativity and have your say next week, if only for those who can't

More to the Story

By Ben Bennett

Maybe it's a hangover from Thanksgiving but I keep looking at the news and wondering how anyone lucky enough to live in Guelph has any reason to complain.

Compared to so many folks across the world today we have such a cushy life. We can walk the streets safely, there is hot water in our houses and more choices of sour cream in the stores than actual food items on the shelves in many shops in the Third World.

Oh yes, and we get to choose who runs the show.

Please excuse the somewhat melodramatic opening but what is it with people whose whole life seems to be spent complaining about how hard done by they are? Maybe I spend too much time reading the anger blogs.

Given that we are so fortunate to have a system that actually seeks out our input before governments are formed, it really saddens me to see how in so many countries that privilege is being abused.

It is, ironically, a tribute to our democracy that we have the luxury to act like spoiled brats – especially at election time.

Elections should be about ideas: my plan versus your plan, his approach versus her approach, this philosophy versus that philosophy.

We'll get into the reasons why another time, but there is a poison seeping into this formula that is disturbing to see. And it is a terrible insult to those folks overseas who are risking their lives every day just by asking for the opportunity to mark a ballot once in a while.

We've seen that poison with negative media campaigns at the federal level, in the robocalls scandal and now we have attack ads here in Guelph.

The trouble is that they work, apparently, so if one side starts it the other side feels bound to do the same. We might call it mutually assured distraction. And that's what it is.

Rather than talk about ideas and policies, all the talk – and hence the coverage - is about something else. It's about the "fight" not the future.

To their credit, the local media and some of the citizen websites have given the various municipal candidates the opportunity to submit their 10 cents' worth on the issues of the day and this is a great service for voters looking to make their choices,

As for the various lists that have appeared, that's all they are.

A civic group a few years back listed candidates it felt were closely aligned with its declared philosophy. Some folks got very upset about that at the time. This time we have another group issuing a slate of names, from some of the same people who were so appalled at the release of the previous list.

Let's not waste time debating whether that constitutes a recommendation or a suggestion, or if this reflects how closely those on the list may be to the organization. We do know, for sure, that this group started the negative campaign ads. It may, inadvertently, have put off a few of those who have supported the candidates on its list, just as the response to those ads may have alienated some on the other side of the philosophical divide.

Once a list is out there, those folks are tarred with a certain brush. Indeed, it may be argued that such lists are useful; those who feel differently from the group issuing the list will know who *not* to vote for.

If you think about it, though, we don't really vote for a person so much as an agent who is likely to make the decisions that match our own world view.

During the campaign, some candidates will tell you what they would like to bring to the community, acknowledging that requires investment; others will tell you what they would like to take away, looking to reduce the tax burden.

Both views are entirely legitimate, and we can perhaps look at Sweden and the United States as extreme examples of each. This being Canada, we are somewhere in between.

So, dear reader, please ignore all this negative nonsense and look at what the candidates say they will do and how they plan to do it.

Perhaps then we can claw back a little dignity with those who do not have this privilege.

(Ben Bennett's past columns can be found at www.bbc.guelph.org.)