

Stopping the sleaze parade, one vote at a time

OPINION

Stopping the Sleaze Parade
A lot of people come to me, and they say, "Richard, how should I vote in the next federal election?" My usual reply follows the lines of, "What are you, stupid? The Liberal Party was elected in 1993, which means the next federal election can't be called until at least

the year 2018! By which time every province except Ontario will have seceded anyways, so don't sweat it!"

As people often do after saying something either extremely foolish or extremely wise, or in my case, both, I've been giving the question some more thought. I end up asking myself, "Who are these people that ask me for advice on such important and in-

dividual matters, and why don't any of them exist in the real world?"

But imaginary friends aside, I've reconsidered my position, because I'm realizing that we as a country have an embarrassing habit of voting complete idiots into office. In fact, scratch that: we as a continent

(North America) have a knack for electing candidates who, although extremely sincere and not at all interested in the financial remuneration associated with public office in the forms of salaries, secretaries, drivers, subsidized lunches and haircuts, generous pensions, and the opportunity to wield limitless and unchecked power, are usually total boobs.

In some cases, this compound noun can be applied literally. Take the recent "retirement" of Republican Senator Robert "Bob" "Boob" "Boobs-on-the-Brain" Packwood. Mr. Packwood is alleged to have sexually harassed at least 17 women in the last 24 years. These offenses have ranged from putting his hand up the skirts of women at party fundraisers to forcibly tongue-kissing staff members whom he kept working after hours in his office on Capitol Hill. Mr. Packwood never missed an opportunity — he kissed the woman operating the private elevator on the Hill every time he used it.

I can't help wondering two things:

(1) 17 women in 24 years? What'd you do during those other seven years, Bob? Rent "Long Dong Silver" with a recent appointee to the Supreme Court?

(2) If the powerful Mr. Packwood had been half as en-

ergetic in his actual Senate duties, maybe the Republicans would've rung up a smaller debt in the past, rather than bitching and moaning about the Democrats who try to reduce it now.

In a press conference after giving his resignation speech from the Senate floor (not literally, which was good), Mr. Packwood made no apologies for his behaviour and expressed no regrets, suggesting that his actions might be explained by the fact that he was often drunk.

So the thought of Mr. Packwood lurching around Capitol Hill for more than twenty years in a drunken stupor strong enough to cause him to fondle unconsenting women without a second thought is supposed to make us feel better about the whole fiasco?

Question: Why didn't any other colleague, out of personal concern and his or her own duty to the American people, suggest that Bob seek some help a little sooner? Only a fool would contend that no other senator knew what Mr. Packwood's habits were — they could've saved a lot of women a lot of grief.

Ugly fact #1: That's not the way it's done in a still predominantly male world. It's taken three whole years from the first charge of sexual harassment against Mr. Packwood for the Senate Ethics Committee to force his retirement.

Ugly fact #2: The Ethics Committee probably forced Mr. Packwood out reluctantly, because most of American senators have drinking problems and/or sexist attitudes. On Capitol Hill, booze is your friend and female staffers are window dressing when you're a man with power.

I suppose Mr. Packwood's drinking buddies would come after me, saying, hell, why didn't

those women come forward sooner? The old Clarence Thomas/Anita Hill defence. In most cases, the women who worked for him quit; the others, if they even knew him before the assault, would avoid him from then on. These women didn't come forward sooner because they were humiliated and embarrassed, just as any of us would be if we thought we were the only person who'd been subjected to such abuse. I say again, if only another senator had had the moral fibre to talk to Bob, or tell the voters, things might have been different.

I'm sorry, but there's nothing courageous about a man walking around a government building with his penis in one hand and a bottle in the other.

Of course, then Bob's girl-watching pals would remind me that, well, Bob's got a drinking problem and he's admitted it — isn't that courageous? Hello! Excuse me! I'm sorry, but there's nothing courageous about a man walking around a government building with his penis in one hand and a bottle in the other.

So, to bring all this back to my original point, who the hell kept voting this sleazebag into office? The problem, however, is not as simple as there being a lot of stupid in one particular state of the union; there's a lot of stupid people in every state of the union. But before we Canadians get too smug, let's not forget that there's a similar proportion of stupid people in every province in Canada.

We could blame all sorts of

other factors. Sure, the pressures of the political system drive our leaders and elected representatives to form addictions to alcohol or other chemical stimulants. Certainly, the media, in its effort to sell, sell, sell, has the ability to put an emphasis on the failures and not accomplishments of politicians. And few of us are aware of the fact that the Canadian political system has no mechanism or procedure which enables the voters to recall a candidate once s/he is elected — people in a certain Liberal riding in B.C. discovered that when their lawyer-MP turned out to be just an MP.

In the end, the onus is "on us." If we were to take more time and devote more energy and thought to learning about the candidates, we might not end up electing power-hungry dinosaurs or half-wit opportunists all the time. It is the voter's responsibility to meet or at least hear their candidate in a public forum.

This is as simple as calling his/her campaign office and finding out where his/her nearest appearance is. Of course, campaign handlers fear too much contact between you and the candidate, so politely indicate to them that without seeing the candidate in a debate or a question-and-answer meeting with the electorate, you cannot possibly vote for him/her.

If we don't take the time and make the effort to learn about the people whom we might vote into government or opposition to represent our views and desires for the country as a whole, we will not get the leaders and representatives we need. We will only get the ones whom we deserve, and the sleaze parade will march on, south and north of the 49th parallel.

Richard Lim

...cont'd from previous page: "JOE"

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Some of you may not know it, but I have a few disadvantages too. I am part Micmac. I am part Jewish. I have a learning disability. I have arthritis in my back, hips, knees, and fingers. And to top it all off, I face homophobia every day because I am a fag, and small-minded people think that it's okay to treat me poorly.

So what? Big Fucking Deal. If you think that for one minute those things are in any way going to stop me from succeeding in life, you are very, very mistaken.

So wake up, stop whining, stop being a victim, and GET A LIFE!

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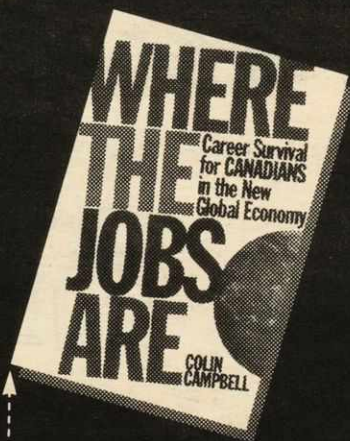
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