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OttawaWatch 327: Electrifying Christmas minutes

By Lloyd Mackey

The three people who Kevin Newman challenged to have positive comments about a member from another party have had differing political outcomes. Trudeau, of course, became prime minister. His positive outbursts about political opponents are few and far between. Del Mastro ended up in difficulties relating to political contributions by supporters which were less than legit under Elections Canada rules. And Leslie was defeated in the 2015 election that saw Trudeau become PM. During a post-election panel discussion, Conservative Lisa Raitt gave Leslie high praise, causing her to tear up.

Raitt herself was defeated in the 2019 election. She is now co-director, with former Liberal cabinet minister Anne McLellan, of Coalition for a Better Future – an organization which, in my modest view, has a useful and valid role to play.

In 2017, Leslie became president and CEO of the World Wildlife Fund Canada.

It was an electrifying two minutes on CTV's *Question Period* this past Sunday, December 18.

After the usual attacks and counter-attacks by the talking heads, *QP*'s co-anchor, Kevin Newman invited – yea, required – his three MP guests to say something good about their political opponents.

The three, Megan Leslie of the NDP, the Liberals' Justin Trudeau and Dean Del Mastro of the Conservative party, all rose to the occasion.

I was watching this epic performance, warmly propped up in my Lazy Boy, resting my ribs from some cracks sustained in a tumble a few days before. I could not believe my ears and wondered, later, if I had snoozed off and dreamed, wishfully, the quotes I thought I heard.

Yesterday (Monday), thanks to the Internet miracle, I clicked on to CTV on line and listened to the interview in question. And I took notes. I knew that this had the makings of OttawaWatch's Christmas gift to its readers.

Leslie and Trudeau had just finished castigating the Conservatives, respectively, for a “bewildering” array of legislation-enforcing tactics and a “profound disrespect for the other parties.” And Del Mastro (who happens to be Prime Minister Stephen Harper's parliamentary secretary) challenged the opposition to bring improvement – rather than obstructionist – proposals to the upcoming deliberations on Budget 2012.

Then, cautioning viewers that he had asked the trio to make some positive comments in the “spirit of Christmas”, Newman provided 30 seconds each.

Not to give away the outcome, but, after about one-minute, Newman enthused that “this feels good.” And I have to agree, as an adherent to the relatively unpopular “civility school” of politics. It felt so good that, as earlier indicated, I thought I was dreaming.

So what was so electrifying about what the three MPs were saying?

- NDPer Leslie, from Halifax, almost chose the easy way out, commending the other opposition party’s aboriginal affairs critic, for “working with us” on the Attawapiskat file. Then she offered quick praise for Foreign Affairs Minister John Baird, who, she said “works well with his critics.”
- Montreal Liberal Trudeau built on Leslie’s Attawapiskat comments by paying tribute to Charlie Angus, the NDPer in whose riding the troubled First Nations community is located. Then he gave high praise to the naval ship contract arrangements that the Conservatives had successfully concluded just weeks before. It was an “excellent model,” he suggested, to which he impishly added, should be applied to fighter jet negotiations. And, he reinforced Leslie’s commendation for Baird, singling out the foreign affairs minister’s repudiation of Uganda’s proposed “gay-bashing” legislation. Trudeau hinted that such progressive thinking was unusually “strong” for a Conservative government.
- Peterborough’s Del Mastro thanked Leslie for her comments on the naval ship contracts, pointing out that Public Works Minister Rona Ambrose deserved the credit. And he commended Liberal Leader Bob Rae’s getting suicide and other mental health issues to the debate level several weeks ago. “As a person whose extended family has been impacted” by the suicide issue, he seemed grateful that it was being discussed.

At Christmas, in recent years, depression and other suicide-breeding illnesses have provided a backdrop for a fair amount of discussion. Indeed, many churches now hold “Blue Christmas” services for people facing loneliness or otherwise feeling left out of the joy of celebrating Christ’s birth.

Edna and I want to take this opportunity to wish Christmas joy to our *Ottawa Watch* readers. And, given that there is another side to the Season, we would urge readers to find some ways to help meet the emotional, spiritual and physical needs of those who cross our paths, who need such help,.

*Let every heart prepare Him room
And heaven and nature sing!*

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By the way, my cracked ribs are slowly but surely healing.