

**Healthy Democracy Forum
Remarks for HDP Advisory Group Welcome by Senator Bernadette Clement
Sunday October 20, 2024
Westin Harbour Castle Toronto – Room to be provided
Approximately 8:55 am**

Good morning, and thank you Petra.

And welcome everyone to the second day of this unique Forum.

I'm a proud, self-professed democracy nerd. And I suspect many of you are as well.

It's why we are here, keen and eager this beautiful Sunday morning.

I'm also here to welcome you on behalf of the Healthy Democracy Project Advisory Group—an important group I'm very proud to have joined.

I want to thank AMO and their Board for demonstrating leadership in this space. For calling our collective attention to the importance of our local democracies. And how we can't ignore our democracies and institutions and simply assume they are fine and unassailable. Or, that if they aren't, that nothing can be done.

We must tend to our democracies and to the people who operate our democratic institutions.

This morning I will quickly touch on three points:

1. The "good 'ole days"
2. Urgency
3. Joy and hope

One of yesterday's conversations was focused on the groups who attract and support candidates. And the barriers and challenges faced by candidates. Central to that is our current culture of toxicity.

And that brings me to the so called "good ole days".

A year ago, on the august floor of the Canadian Senate I was yelled at, bullied and intimidated by a fellow Senator while shouts calling me a fascist were hurled by others.

When called out for his behaviour, the offending Senator lamented the current political climate, wishing for a return to the days when you could yell at someone and then go for a beer with them afterwards.

He wished for a return to those halcyon days when people had thicker skin.

I told him that I have no wish to return to those days—in those days I wouldn't have been able to even be a Canadian Senator

And second, I don't want thicker skin. I love my skin as it is, with its flaws and imperfections—and yes, with its sensitivities.

Instead of looking backwards, I'm here with you today seeking new and better days where we can disagree respectfully, civilly while not endangering our opponent's personal safety.

DRAFT

The second point I want to bring up this morning is around the urgency of this work.

One thing I've experienced as I've moved through different levels of political offices is this—new levels, new devils.

At each increasing level of public or political profile, you are met with increasing scrutiny and accountability, which is fine.

But you're also met with increasingly corrosive toxicity, bullying, threats and abuse, which most certainly is not fine.

Today's focus is on accelerating democracy. It's about experimenting with different ways to counteract the devils of our democracies—the mounting incivility, polarization, and disinformation.

I commend each and everyone of you for being here—for choosing this to be your priority today.

So the first two points were kind of downers, but the third isn't.

A question I get asked from time to time is where do I find hope and joy through all these challenges and while fighting day in and day out.

There are two answers to this—one is that I fundamentally believe in public services and the collective good that can be accomplished. The other answer is in the conversation that took place yesterday—engaging youth in local democracy and elections.

In yesterday's session, lead by Apathy is Boring, dozens of young people and youth-focused organizations gave their best advice on how we can do a better job involving young people in the decisions that will shape their towns and cities and impact their futures.

I spent the full day with them, and I left revitalized, refreshed, and invigorated.

If we do as they ask.

If we meet them where they are.

If we listen to what they tell us.

If we act on their advice and priorities.

If we include them in our structures, governance, processes, and decision making.

If we trust them.

We will be the better for it.

Those young people are my hope. And they fill me with joy.

It's with that message that I turn the day back over to you. Let's look forwards not backwards, let's act with urgency, and let's center young people in our work.

Thank you to the AMO team for creating the space for this critically important work.

Now let's roll up our sleeves and get to work!

Thank you!