

Editorial ? U.S. problem: The missing middle

There are obviously many reasons for the enormous difference we currently see in the political situations north and south of the Canada-U.S. border.

One reason, obviously, is that one country chose revolution and the other one evolution, and related to that was the inclination of our Fathers of Confederation 150 years ago to avoid some of the causes of the just-ended civil war. Perhaps the most important difference between the two federations was the awarding to our federal government of sole jurisdiction in the area of criminal law. Another, surely, is our judicial system, in which thankfully we don't elect judges and to a considerable extent have seen appointments made more on the basis of qualifications rather than political allegiance. We suspect most of our readers wince when they hear that in the U.S. the Republicans control not just the presidency and Congress but also the U.S. Supreme Court. But in our submission, possibly the most important reason for the current turmoil in the U.S. is its entrenched two-party system with the two drifting ever farther apart.

Thankfully, Canada has not witnessed anything like the recent riots in Charlottesville, Virginia, even at the height of Quebec's separatist movement, and that's not for lack of fringe elements in our society.

But one reason, surely, for the fact that the Liberal party is often (albeit derisively) labelled Canada's 'natural governing party' has been the existence of credible alternatives on both the right and left of the political system.

It obviously won't happen, but we think it would be wonderful if moderates in the Republican and Democratic parties broke away and formed an Independent Party which championed occupation of the middle of the road.

Given some credible leadership, such a third party would undoubtedly attract votes from more than just those Americans who identify themselves as independents rather than either the GOP or Democrats. It would also garner support from moderates in both parties and from the vast numbers of younger folk who currently just don't vote.

Perhaps the ultimate irony is that the demagogue currently occupying the White House was once regarded as a Democrat and could conceivably have sought either party's nomination.

Whatever the case, he chose the GOP and quickly discovered that the path to victory lay in gaining the support of those who felt left out by previous administrations.

Perhaps the ultimate irony is that at a time when his approval ratings hover around 33 per cent his support is rock-solid in a base that's mainly low-income earners but includes white supremacists, neo-Nazis and anti-semites.

If nothing else, the great advantage a middle-of-the-road party enjoys over those to the right or left is that they don't have to worry much about their 'base,' which tends to be 'miles wide but barely inches deep.' All they need do is come up with policies that fall midway between those espoused by their opponents.

Perhaps an illustration came in the controversial settlement with Omar Khadr's lawyers, which produced outrage from the Conservatives but silence from the New Democrats, who had criticized previous governments' refusal to come to the aid of the former child soldier.