

## Bill Rea ? Conventional entertainment

So Donald Trump is going to be carrying the Republican colours in the upcoming presidential election south of the border, and Hillary Clinton is going to be doing the same for the Democrats.

I know I'm referring to the political situation in a foreign country, but it is also a country that has an enormous impact on our own. Many of you might not be interested in what's going on in the United States, but I maintain you should be. As many of you who know me are aware, I'm something of a political animal. Because of my job, I have to keep up to date with the politics in my municipality, province and country. Because of my curiosity, I choose to keep track of some of the things going on in the States. Two weeks ago, we saw the Republicans pick Trump as their candidate; something I would have said was next to impossible a couple of months ago. It's not the first time I've been wrong about something, and I can assure you it won't be the last. And as I've written many times before, there's always plenty of room for surprises in any election cycle.

And last week, we saw Clinton get a similar nod from her party. That came as less of a surprise. The fact is that eight years ago, when she and Barack Obama were battling it out for the Democratic nomination, my money was on Hillary. I based that on the fact she would have better spin doctors at her disposal; the same spin doctors who helped keep her husband Bill from being bounced from office about a decade prior to that.

But enough of the past. This is 2016, and we've got our future to worry about. And the stage was set over the last couple of weeks with the conventions.

Conventions are a fun part of the American political system, and the Canadian system too, although they seem to be a dying breed up here. When I was studying politics in university more than 30 years ago, one of my professors told me conventions were not really part of the Canadian tradition, but something we picked up from the folks to the south. They don't have them much any more, as the party membership at large now has more of a role in picking a leader. The last one I attended was in the mid 1990s, when Dalton McGuinty was elected Liberal leader in Ontario. I suspect that will be the last convention I ever get to, at least in this country.

But if my prof was right about it being a tradition we borrowed from the Yanks, I firmly believe it's a tradition that they're going to keep for some time to come.

Good for them!

The result has been two weeks of entertainment, as two political parties of the nearest convenient superpower try to hammer out who's going to be in charge for next four years.

Alas, the demands of my job prevented me from seeing much the two conventions, but I was able to catch a good part of both of them, including the acceptance speeches, and the introductions, along with a lot of the other doings.

Whatever one might think of Donald Trump, there is no denying he raised some pretty impressive kids. And Clinton raised a pretty impressive daughter, although I got the feeling she is not too used to the limelight. No matter.

Both conventions had their moments, both positive and negative.

For example, Trump's wife Melania has been criticized for having apparently plagiarized her remarks to the convention, borrowing from Michelle Obama's address from eight years ago. I'm prepared to give Mrs. Trump a pass on that. True, had I borrowed someone else's words in my writings and tried to pass them off as my own, there'd be hell to pay. On the other hand, I make my living writing in the only language with which I am intimately familiar (profanity notwithstanding). Mrs. Trump was addressing millions of people in a language other than her mother tongue, trying to promote her husband. A bit of a difference.

On the other hand what really caught my attention was the way my wife got into the conventions, especially the Republican. She started discussions with me about what she had seen on there tube. It is usually the case that when we discuss politics, I do the initiating. The problem was work-related demands caused me to miss a lot of the Republican production.

But it also seems that Beth was not alone. From what I have read and heard, the TV ratings for the Republican convention were a lot higher than those for the show put on by the Democrats.

I guess it boils down to the fact that a guy who I dismissed as a clown a couple of months ago might be the next President of the United States.

?Nobody knows the system better than me, which is why I alone am the only one who can fix it,? Trump said in his acceptance speech.

I think I'm in good company when I ask exactly how is the current system busted, but that's Trump's matter to address. The economy could be done better, but it's not doing that bad. America has not recently endured a military or diplomatic embarrassment on the order of Vietnam or the Iranian hostage crisis. I just don't see the problem that Trump seems to think needs solving.

And how highly regarded is Trump with the Republican hierarchy? There are two former Republican presidents who are still alive, both with the last name of Bush. Did we hear anything from either?

The Republicans did have their convention first, meaning the Democrats knew what kind of act they had to beat. That's not always a big advantage.

Back in 1992, the Democrats had their convention first, with Bill Clinton coming out of it looking like a big boss in the making. I well remember then councillor Richard Whitehead, who was the highest ranking local liberal I was still on speaking terms with at the time, assuring me the election was already in the bag. And I reminded him that the Republicans had yet to have their turn, and incumbent George H.W. Bush was going to close the gap in short order.

If your memories need refreshing, Hillary's husband won that election handily, and the late Mr. Whitehead had another reason (as if he needed any more) to admonish me to keep my yap shut when it came to making election predictions.

But there were parts of the Democrats convention that gave me the idea that they really have their act together. There were several tributes to fallen police officers, which one would have thought would be the domain of the Republicans.

The issue still has a couple of months in which to play out. Election day is early in November, with the new president taking office in January. At the present time, I'm predicting Americans are about to swear in their first woman president.

But we do know what my predictions are worth.

