

Bill Rea ? Trump can only go so far

Many people find elections both entertaining and a lot of fun.

I'm in that group too, which is one of the reasons why I got into this line of work. Being sick of waiting tables, of course, is another reason.

For those of us seeking such entertainment, this part of the world is going to be a dry place this year. We've got at least another three years before a federal election in Canada, and at least two before we get to vote provincially or Municipally. Election junkies in other provinces might have more to look forward to in 2016. But in these parts, the best we can do is try and figure out who the Conservative party of Canada gives Stephen Harper's old job to. I have no guesses to make at this point.

But we can always turn on CNN and see what's happening in the contest to pick the next President of the United States. I've been making more of an effort to do that, with my wife's permission, of course. As the weeks go by, it's getting a little easier to get her to switch off the Leaf games, although I anticipate lots of complications if I try to get her to channel hop once the Blue Jays get going. And when it comes to getting Beth to switch from one of her crime shows, I have nowhere near the necessary guts to even make the attempt.

The contest south of the border is an interesting one.

I turned on CNN?last Tuesday night, getting home rather late, driving through that evening's brutal snow storm. Beth was still up when I got in (I think she was reluctant to retire before I walked through the door). I was tired, and I knew I had a heavy day ahead of me. But I couldn't resist the temptation of turning CNN on and getting some of those political insights one gets this time of year. You may recall last Tuesday was one of those ?Super Tuesdays,? in which several states hold their primaries or caucuses (I'm assuming there's a difference between the two, but I don't know what it is).

Not surprisingly, Democrat Hillary Clinton and Republican Donald Trump did very well last week. While neither were able to nail down the presidential nominations of their respective parties, they have opened up substantial leads.

I'm also, at this stage, ready to make a prediction that Hillary Clinton becomes the next president. Those of you who are familiar with my record at predicting things like elections are probably casting money down on Donald Trump right now. The late former councillor Richard Whitehead would be busting a gut laughing if he had read this.

In other words, my record as a political prognosticator stinks.

We, of course, have been hearing and reading a lot about the presidential race in the States. I think things have been made a little more interesting because we know the incumbent, Barack Obama, is not allowed to seek a third term, as stipulated in the 22nd amendment to the American Constitution. That amendment was passed, according to my reading, because law makers down south didn't want another Franklin Roosevelt winning four elections in a row ? even in that democracy, there are just some things you don't leave up to the voters. Whether a person might be over qualified for a job is on that list.

There is a lot of concern about Trump as a possible nominee for the Republicans. As I have stated many times, I basically regard him as a clown. However, while nothing has been decided at this point, it looks very much like he's the guy the Republicans are going to give the nod to.

In the days after last Tuesday, both John McCain and Mitt Romney, the Republicans who lost the last two presidential elections to Obama, have come out to urge the party members to pick another candidate. I don't think either was trying to drum up support for themselves, although I guess nothing is impossible. But I have heard at least one noted political commentator come out with the line that the latest ploy was the work of two ?losers.?

The fact is it looks like it might be impossible to keep Trump from the nomination.

I have heard other people refer to the apparent split in the republican party, between the old guard, the Trump movement, the very conservative tea party movement, etc. I have heard others speculate this could lead to the demise of the party, a form of hyperbole I haven't heard since the last couple of seasons of The West Wing (one reason why I was glad the show died when it did).

Even if Trump gets the nomination, I don't think it's going to lead to the abolition of anything. It won't be the first time extremists have carried party colours. History shows they don't get particularly far, as people like Barry Goldwater and George McGovern learned the hard way. Although both were soundly defeated when they ran for president, their respective parties won the elections four years later.

But as I stated above, I don't see how he can get elected. One of the reasons extremists have trouble in national campaigns is they can't gain broad appeal among the voters.

Trump, for example, has proposed building a wall along the Mexican border, and getting the Mexicans to pay for it. That should go down well with Hispanics come election day. You just can't tick off segments of the population.

There are parallels in Canadian politics. Think back some 25 years, when Progressive Conservatives (particularly in the West) got mad and created the Reform Party of Canada. It's appeal quickly spread across the country, but it couldn't concentrate enough votes to even come close to forming a government. I believe that's because they were too conservative. They could easily attract voters from the right end of the political spectrum (I remember covering Reform meetings attended by people knew were, or at least had been, Liberals). But that's not going to attract enough votes to form a government, let alone a majority. That's why the prime of Reform was also the high time for Jean Chretien

Sometimes people rather far to one side or another of the spectrum do go far, but there are circumstances in place that allow it. Ronald Reagan is a good example. He was clearly a right-wing conservative who could inspire a lot of people, much the way Trump seems to be able to do. But I think Reagan was better at it, and he had a knack of being able to make people like, if not love, him. I'm not sure Trump has that ability.

Besides, Reagan came along at a bad time for Americans, when the economy represented both unemployment and high inflation, they were still licking their wounds over Vietnam and there were some 50 hostages being held in Iran. A guy like Reagan was able to put smiles on a lot of faces.

True, things could be better in the States (Canada too, for that matter). But they are nothing like what they were in the late 1970s. There's no need at this time for a guy like Trump.

