

Civic Crunch Time

by BROCK WEIR

Forging ahead into the first week of the 2025 Federal election, we're being asked to consider many factors from many different angles.

Once upon a time, it was a matter of simply picking the party that best represents your views, or the local candidate you feel, regardless of party lines, will best represent your interests in Ottawa.

Now, of course, it is significantly more complex situation.

Strategic voting may have always been a factor in our electoral deliberations, but, for some, I'd wager it's becoming more and more important as we weigh not only the government we want ? that being, the one that best aligns with our respective visions for the future ? but the government we need to address some of the most important issues of our time, particularly issues we wish were not key on the ballot this time around.

It was once a matter of simply comparing and contrasting our collective values, which set of ideals we each subscribe to, and which party, party leader, or local candidate for said party will help us get closer to the goals we want.

In addition to the perennial and recent issues of affordability, housing, and the rule of law, we have a different angle to consider this year: how our respective votes will help bolster our Canadian identity, independence, and the entire concept of our sovereignty as the government south of our border does its utmost to undermine and weaken almost every element of said identity, independence, and sovereignty.

It's an unenviable position to be in, yet while we're in uncharted territory as Canadians, we can look abroad to other nations that have faced similar threats from similar friends-cum-foes, and use this knowledge to make our own decisions ? for our own betterment.

It's encouraging to see that, if anything, the threats from the United States have largely renewed our collective sense of identity, values and sovereignty across most party lines.

The days where people like Rick Mercer and his ?Talking to Americans? kept us chuckling because our neighbours didn't know, for instance, that Peter Mansbridge is a journalist who made his name on Canada's public broadcaster rather than a piece of public infrastructure, are long-gone and seem so twee in retrospect.

Now, we're taking what they're presenting to us seriously and fighting back in any way we can, whether we're making a concerted effort to buy local from area independent retailers, ensuring we're buying Canadian ? or non-American ? at chain grocery stores, flying the flag just a little bit higher, or singing the national anthem at sports games with throats just a little bit fuller.

All of these things ? and many others not listed here ? are doing wonders for morale, and in standing firm on the international stage ? but there is still some work to do.

While we know Peter Mansbridge isn't a means for cross-border travel and ?tuque? is not part of a Regional way of counting to ten, I'm afraid we need a bit more introspection on who we are as a country and how our institutions operate.

I think it's safe to say that in one way or another we all have at least one misconception of either what Canada is or how it works.

Before this fight with the United States was provoked, I suspect a huge swath of our country was surprised that inter-provincial trade was not simply a matter of sending a flatbed laden down with Ontario products westward to Manitoba or eastward to New

Brunswick, and vice-versa.

Now, we realize that it's not the well-oiled machine we thought it was and work is taking place behind the scenes to break down unnecessary barriers.

Others, hopefully far fewer, may have puzzled over the fact that one of Mark Carney's first acts upon becoming Prime Minister was to visit King Charles III at Buckingham Palace. ?Why would he visit the King of England before meeting with Trump?? one critic cried, before another rightly pointed out that he was meeting the King of this country as well. A show of sovereignty, anyone?

Others ? long-time critics of the Liberal party, mostly ? also vented their spleens at the idea that Carney was (a) an ?illegal? Prime Minister as he had not been directly elected by the people, and/or (b) an ?illegal? Prime Minister for the same reason, in a Canadian first.

This, despite the fact that Prime Ministers have been appointed rather than directly elected quite regularly in our history, rightly or wrongly.

Paul Martin, for example, became Prime Minister in 2003 when he won his party's leadership race. Kim Campbell became Prime Minister 10 years prior when she succeeded Brian Mulroney as Progressive Conservative leader in 1993.

The difference there is both Martin and Campbell had a seat in the House of Commons at the time, something Carney lacks, at least until voters decide next month. The last time Canada had a Prime Minister who won the Premiership through a party rather than a nation-wide vote and did not have a seat as a Member of Parliament was John Turner in 1984.

This is to say nothing in support, against, or in defence of the new and current Liberal leader, but just a statement of fact.

As the Liberals continue to close the wide lead the Conservatives had in national polling just a few short months ago, there will likely be talk of what happens if either party wins without seats to secure a majority in Parliament. The winning party can either try to govern alone or with the support of another party in the House of Commons, such as the Supply and Confidence agreement struck by the outgoing government with the NDP, or through a more formal coalition, such as the one mooted by the Liberals and the NDP ? with support of the Bloc Quebecois ? in 2008 during the Conservative government of Stephen Harper.

You might not like it, and you might not like prorogation, but that's how our system of government works at present, and none of these moves are illegal or necessarily a betrayal of voters. Should there be new safeguards and potentially other changes? Potentially, but that will be a long, drawn-out discussion for a different time.

In the meantime, however, particularly during election time, we should all be well-versed on our system of government, what's allowed and what's not allowed, and how we and the people can use it to our best advantage. Ignorance might be bliss, but misinformation is not ? particularly in times of an existential crisis.

As far as systems go, there is always room for improvement, but it's the system we've got ? and whether it is through enhanced civic education, or some self-led learning in the crunch time before April 28, it's incumbent upon us to all know who represents us, who our voices are, and how they fit into our electoral puzzle at all levels of government.