

Cosmic Common Sense

by BROCK WEIR

Some people, at this particular snapshot in time, might think I'm a bit foolish for writing this week's column before the noon hour on Monday.

As far as Mondays go, this one is generally pretty run-of-the-mill.

Although a bit cool for my taste, there's nothing particularly distinguishable about it. Sure, we had glorious sunshine and warmth on Sunday, but there's nothing particularly surprising about April clouds; after all, those April showers that are supposed to beget May flowers need to come from somewhere ? no matter how diligent you are with your garden hose or lawn sprinkler.

In fact, the only thing that really distinguishes this April Monday from the one that kick-started the month, aside from the prescribed tomfoolery that is a hallmark of April 1, is the countdown to this afternoon's solar eclipse.

Eclipses both solar and lunar have, of course, been part of our everyday lives throughout our recorded history, and naturally, long before that.

Excitement was in the air for the last solar eclipse I covered for our newspapers, but truth be told the interest in this one, despite the less-than-favourable forecast, is something else again.

While this eclipse is rarer than most of us have seen before, people are travelling far distances for the chance to see? something.

Hotels in a city in upstate New York where we have been taking an annual family holiday for decades raised their room rates by nearly 300 per cent to reap the benefits of eclipse-seekers.

Students in many jurisdictions had the day off of school ostensibly to take it all in ? safely, under the watchful eyes of their parents and away from any school liability should a student happen to look up without protective gear.

Whatever is propelling people in this direction, it was a feeling that was certainly catching, and, with just a few hours to go before the darkness temporarily settles in, the excitement is still there regardless of the fact the weather will render the experience to little more than someone bumping into a dimmer switch when they're leaving the room.

In some quarters, however, there is a degree of trepidation.

Despite these astrological phenomena occurring with measurable and consistent regularity since humankind developed the ability to measure such things, there have been those who have taken the stage, playing directly to the balcony, that this eclipse is everything from a ?man-made effort to control the weather,? to a fabricated way for some mysterious entity or group thereof to test any kind of nefarious form of government or government-related measure, to nothing short of a harbinger for at least one of the horsemen of the apocalypse.

These claims, of course, are being fettered by the festering world of social media and echo chambers that are becoming and less and less extricable part of the world.

Many of those who offer such outlandish viewpoints do so through a very political lens and as a means to an end. Through their unfounded bluster and their attempts to validate the viewpoints of their followers in a bid to amass followers, they're foregoing any opportunity to inform or educate because, let's be real, that's not what their followers are there for.

Run-of-the-mill astronomy might seem dull in comparison to a government plot or a coming rapture. People want the excitement, the drama, the feeling of having the inside track ? even if they are being wilfully led down the garden path.

It is a win-win for the follower and the influencer, I suppose, but an unfortunate dent in our society. And it's a win-win for the misinformation peddler, too; if nothing happens, they can simply move the goalposts and blame whatever entity, fictional or otherwise, for getting in the way of their forecast coming to pass.

It wasn't all that long ago when most people entering public life, whether they were a politician, an educator, or anyone with a pulpit, did so to, as the old saying went, ?win the hearts and minds of the people.? Increasingly, however, it feels that it's less of a matter of winning hearts and minds than meeting those hearts and minds where they live and even governing one's self accordingly.

Maybe I'm old fashioned, but I've never been one to vote for someone at any level of government solely because I could see myself sitting down with them for a beer and chin wag.

Don't get me wrong, face-to-face voter engagement is invaluable, but my vote has always gone to (a) the person or party that best represents the direction I would like to see the community, province or country move over the duration of the job they're applying for, and/or (b) the person that's best equipped to deliver on that vision. If the promise is status quo, or looking in the rear-view mirror, why bother?

It's important to recognize that no one candidate can do it alone. No one person is the elusive magic bullet that can solve all the ills they've identified. Instead, it's essential that in addition to the skills, experiences and gifts they bring to the table themselves, they surround themselves with the people who have the skills, experienced and gifts needed to fill in the gaps ? including experts and people with relevant knowledge.

To this end, I was dismayed, and even bewildered, by an email from the Conservative Party of Canada last week deriding just that.

?We aren't going to be taking advice from so-called ?experts,?' they boasted. ?Those are the same ?experts' who were telling us that inflation was ?transitory' and interest rates would stay low forever! Now, these ?experts' are living comfortably while forcing a 23 per cent hike on Canadians already struggling to pay the bills.

?We are done listening to the so-called ?experts.' Conservatives will always listen to the common sense of the common people.?

Listening is always important, particularly to electors ? although I am still unsure just who they mean by ?the common people? ? but it doesn't have to be at the expense of experts, no matter what the political football of the day is. (In this case, the football in question was carbon pricing)

They have put in the hard work, they have invaluable knowledge to impart, knowledge that used to be placed at a much higher value than it is today, alas, and any decision that is made in a vacuum is almost always a terrible one.

On a day like today, I'm more than happy to listen to the so-called experts ? here, meteorologists and astronomers ? that have been tracking movements in our solar system for millennia in favour of preparing for any of the doomsday scenarios being perpetuated by certain elements masquerading as ?common sense,? something which feels in shorter and shorter supply these days.

If you're reading this, congrats on coming through to the other side with me.

Now, let's get back to work celebrating facts, knowledge, and true common sense.