

Editorial ? Trump and waning media clout

Only time will tell, but we'll be surprised to see a sharp dip in support for Donald Trump in the wake of his Democrat opponent, Hillary Clinton, winning editorial support from some right-wing dailies.

There likely was a time when editorial endorsements meant a lot for political candidates, and there's no doubt that some owners of media outlets still think they have lots of clout. However, recent experience suggests otherwise.

For example, it was just a year ago that Post Media chairman Paul Godfrey ordered all the chain's papers to support the re-election of the Stephen Harper-led Conservatives, and even The Globe and Mail published a strange editorial favouring the Tories, albeit while expressing hope they'd replace Harper as leader.

We all know now what happened in the election, and perhaps the most Godfrey can claim is that the editorials stemmed the Liberal tide and kept the Conservatives as the main opposition party with a solid 30 per cent voter support.

There's surely little doubt that North America's daily papers have a lot less clout than once was the case. Not only are there a lot fewer of them around these days, but those that remain have a lot fewer readers. And on top of that there's the role being played by social media and its tendency to avoid complex discussions.

Whatever the case, we'll be watching with some interest just what happens next month in some traditionally Republican states in which few, if any, of the dailies have endorsed Trump for president.

Since long before the advent of the Model T, the right-leaning Arizona Republic (once called the Republican) hadn't endorsed a Democrat for president. That all changed in the last weeks.

In its endorsement, the Republic called Clinton the 'only choice' for voters.

It described Trump as 'not conservative and . . . not qualified,' adding, 'That's why, for the first time in our history, The Arizona Republic will support a Democrat for president.'

The editorial made a point-by-point case against Trump. He didn't have the temperament and regularly responded to criticism 'with the petulance of verbal spit wads.' His immigration ideas wouldn't work and are actually against the will of most people in Arizona, a state with a large Latino population. As well, he had shown no ability to control his words or actions, something that it found especially concerning when it comes to giving someone access to nuclear weapons.

Similarly, the conservative Cincinnati Enquirer declared, 'It has to be Hillary Clinton,' ending a nearly century-long tradition of endorsing Republicans. 'Trump is a clear and present danger to our country,' the paper wrote. 'He has no history of governance that should engender any confidence from voters. Trump has no foreign policy experience, and the fact that he doesn't recognize it ' instead insisting that, 'I know more about ISIS than the generals do' ' is even more troubling.'

Even in Texas, the Dallas Morning News called Clinton the 'only one serious candidate on the presidential ballot' and the Houston Chronicle called Trump a 'danger to the Republic' whose 'erratic temperament, his dodgy business practices, his racism, his Putin-like strongman inclinations and faux-populist demagoguery, his contempt for the rule of law, his ignorance,' disqualified him as a presidential candidate.

Will such comments have any effect? A 2011 study from the National Bureau of Economic research found that endorsements that break from a newspaper's typical leanings are powerful for voters, especially if the papers are traditionally conservative.

In the circumstances, a lot will depend on how many, if any, of the current Trump supporters, bother to read or listen.