

Editorial ? U.S. presidents, imagined and real

We wonder how many Americans realize that the actor in the role of United States president in the TV series *Designated Survivor* is a grandson of Tommy Douglas, the father of Canada's medicare system.

Designated Survivor is an American political drama television series starring Kiefer Sutherland, currently being carried on ABC and CTV. (The project skipped the pilot stage and was ordered straight to series Dec. 14, 2015, followed by a formal announcement May 6, 2016. The first episode premiered Sept. 21, 2016, with a full season order of 22 episodes coming eight days later.)

In the plot, on the night of the State of the Union address, an explosion claims the lives of the President and all members of his Cabinet except for Tom Kirkham, the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, who had been named the designated survivor. He is sworn in as President, unaware that the attack is just the beginning of what is to come.

However, Kiefer Sutherland is only one of three U.S. presidents regularly seen on U.S. television stations these days.

One of the other two appears on a CBS series, *Madam Secretary*, while the other shows up daily on TV news shows, since he is Donald Trump, the real one.

We obviously don't know what the writers for the two TV shows had in mind when they portrayed their presidents as modest, unassuming but highly capable and likeable individuals.

President Kirkham had the job thrust upon him and already has survived an assassination attempt aimed at handing the presidency over to a newly appointed vice-president, who happened to have survived the explosion because he was in a bomb-proof room and in reality was part of the apparent conspiracy to seize control of the government.

In *Madam Secretary*, Keith Carradine has the role of President Conrad Dalton. Before going into politics, he had been Director of the Central Intelligence Agency and Elizabeth McCord, whom he appointed Secretary of State, was also at the CIA. He had served in the U.S. Army as a 2nd lieutenant during the Vietnam War. In the show's current season he has managed to be re-elected as an independent, having been ditched by his own party.

Unlike the two TV presidents, the one the U.S. Electoral College installed in November has established himself as faithful only to the core of those who voted for him, and as a result his latest approval ratings are about 37 per cent, or almost half of those enjoyed by his predecessor, Barack Obama, near the end of his second four-year term.

Unlike all his predecessors, Trump seems utterly incapable of ever admitting he made a mistake or lied about anything.

Even in the face of testimony by the director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation that there was no evidence of any surveillance of New York City's Trump Tower aimed at him, the President has thus far refused to admit that he was wrong in alleging on Twitter that Obama had had his phone at the Trump Tower wiretapped.

It now seems utterly beyond doubt that Americans have elected a demagogue whose idol seems to be Russian President Vladimir Putin, currently seen as the world's most powerful politician.

There now seems to be no doubt that Putin's hatred of Hillary Clinton led him to order the hacking of the Democratic National Committee's emails as part of a campaign to influence the U.S. elections.

It is also pretty clear that there were conversations of some sort between the Trump campaign team and Russia's ambassador to the U.S. What we don't know is whether some of those conversations were monitored and, if they were, whether the public will ever be told the subject matter, or at least whether it included discussion of the election.