

Follow the Leader

by BROCK WEIR

In this job, you come to realize that there are a few simple questions that can reveal a lot about a person. What's your favourite colour? What's your favourite band? Or, to borrow a question from the late broadcast journalist Barbara Walters, as she so infamously asked actress Katharine Hepburn, 'If you were a tree, what kind of tree would you be?'

Actually, those questions reveal little, but one question that more often accurately hits a bull's eye, speaking of Katharine Hepburn, is 'Katharine Hepburn or Audrey Hepburn? And why?'

This is not, I hasten to add, an attempt to pit one woman against another. Rather, given that two actresses remain wildly famous, even decades after their death, for very different bodies of work and approaches to life, which one you gravitate towards says a lot about what makes you tick. And, I also hasten to add, there is no wrong answer.

Another revelatory question has been, 'How do you cast your vote when you're at the polling station?'

Taking municipal politics out of the equation, as there are no official party lines, it's often telling to learn whether they're a party voter, a leader voter, or a local representative kind of voter. Given the continued rise of personality politics, I fear the local rep kind of voter is becoming an endangered species, and that's a phenomenon that, in my view, doesn't do us any favours, but I digress.

If you are a local rep voter, chances are you're more likely to be engaged in your town or city at the community level and feel the real vested interest you have in the place you call home.

If you're a leader voter, you're either looking for someone who shares your worldview and vision for the province or country (although, it has to be said, there's a newer subset of voters who are voting for an individual because of who they're not) or the best person to get you closer to that ideal.

If you're a party voter, it can mean one or both of two things? you've either taken the time to delve deep into a party and/or an individual's platform, or you're voting for a party because you've always aligned with them.

Again, there really isn't a wrong approach, but if you're casting your ballot for someone or something out of nothing more than habit, then that's not the best sign of our collective democratic health.

Which brings me to the United States, a country for whom democratic health appears to be on life support.

Vying to either continue in or resume the role of President of the United States are an 81-year-old man who will be 86 by the end of the next term, and a 78-year-old man who will be 83 at the end of the same time period.

One appears to ramble at rallies, sometimes incoherently, other times in misstatements that require a decoder ring, and sentences that seem to have neither a beginning nor an end.

The other appears to ramble at debates, sometimes incoherently or stumbling over words, and uttering sentences that too seem to be in search of a start and end point.

Both have strong following of supporters and detractors.

Both want to get back into that prime piece of Washington real estate?.

And there, really, end the similarities ? which begs the question, in my view, why the sudden huge pile-on of politicians and pundits who are calling for Joe Biden to drop out of the race due to his poor performance in his first debate against Donald Trump?

Since the floodgates opened within minutes of the debate, scores of media outlets across the United States and abroad have called for Biden to throw in the towel, even though there was nothing particularly surprising about this particular piece of political theatre. Alarming, yes. But surprising? Not much we haven't already seen before.

One such call came from the editorial board of the New York Times, which said, if the race came down to just the two candidates, they would endorse Biden, but a ?stronger opponent? was needed to combat what they describe as ?the scale and seriousness of Mr. Trump's challenge to the values and institutions of this country and the inadequacy of Mr. Biden to confront him.?

?Ending his candidacy would be against all of Mr. Biden's personal and political instincts?. Supporters of the president are already explaining away [the debate] as one data point compared with three years of accomplishments. But the president's performance cannot be written off as a bad night or blamed on a supposed cold, because it affirmed concerns that have been mounting for months or even years. Even when Mr. Biden tried to lay out his policy proposals, he stumbled. It cannot be outweighed by other public appearances because he has limited and carefully controlled his public appearances.

?It should be remembered that Mr. Biden challenged Mr. Trump to this verbal duel. He set the rules, and he insisted on a date months earlier than any previous general election debate. He understood that he needed to address longstanding public concerns about his mental acuity and that he needed to do so as soon as possible. The truth Mr. Biden needs to confront now is that he failed his own test.?

That last sentence might indeed be true, but through all of this there is a small sense of déjà vu.

Two elections ago, when Hillary Clinton was the Democrat candidate for the States' top job, questions about the former Secretary of State's health and fitness for office were raised when she was caught on camera stumbling while getting into a vehicle ? and she, at that point, was approximately a decade younger than the two men in the race today.

When it comes to fitness for the job, the incumbent appears held to a much higher standard than his strongest rival ? and while it's not a bad thing to hold an incumbent to such a standard, neither is a newbie here.

Throughout the race, Biden's closest competitor has had more than their fair share of rally, interview, and social media flubs, and uttered tangents that would make that aforementioned decoder ring give up and hit the golf course. Then there's that pesky thing about felony convictions, which in a different day and age likely would have rendered this entire conversation moot.

At the end of the day, I don't think Biden's debate performance, Trump's legal woes, or the ongoing pile-on against the incumbent is going to make a world of difference.

With such diametrically opposed men running for the office on such diametrically opposed platforms (such as they are), I find it hard to believe there are any voters who were ?undecided? before either guy stepped onto the CNN stage.

Chances are, eligible Americans have already locked in their decisions, whether they're a party voter or a leader voter. Whether that's a good thing or a bad thing ? well, only time will tell.