

Human Nature

by SHERALYN ROMAN

It's a sad, sad state of affairs when our base human nature overwhelms what I used to think of as evolutionary progress. When millions upon millions of people vote for a convicted felon over a highly qualified woman whose very gender, not to mention ethnicity, threatens them. As seems to happen so often in politics, even right here at home, despite the majority's core needs for food, safety and security being met, we want more. To be clear, that means more for ourselves, not those we view as 'others.' And, apparently despite the lessons of history, that means we're willing to do just about anything to obtain whatever 'more' means to each of us as individuals.

No matter whom you study, it's pretty much accepted that human nature consists of at least these three basic instincts: self-preservation/survival, food and yes, sex. Beyond that, as probably the most universally known and pyramid drawing psychologist Abraham Maslow would tell us, are needs related to love, belonging and connection, these more esoteric values that mean we've moved beyond our most basic instincts toward caring not just for our family, but our community too. Sadly, somewhere along the way I believe the quest for the almighty dollar has replaced these latter values as well as the final two tiers of Maslow's five stage pyramid: self-respect and self-actualization. What this most recent election in America has shown us is that more than half of American voters did not find it morally repugnant to vote for someone who is a convicted felon because they believed a false narrative that tariffs would make the cost of gas, bread and eggs cheaper.

Trump succeeded in appealing to voter's most basic instincts, not just in economic terms but also by 'othering,' pitting humans against their fellow humans. He used anger to stoke division and frustration to fuel hatred, ensuring everyone focussed on pointing fingers at one another rather than pointing out his flaws, his lack of policy (sure, he had 'concepts of a plan?') and his long list of historical failures both in business and while leading the country through a pandemic.

As Canadians, we watched smugly, secure in our homes north of the longest undefended border in the world, confident that such divisiveness would never happen here. We're more evolved. We're higher on the pyramid. We're a caring nation. We welcome immigrants, embrace racial diversity and support LGBTQ2S+ rights. And yet?increasingly we don't. Federally, a Conservative movement is gaining momentum using many of the same tactics employed south of the border, encouraging anti-vaxxers and convoys of 'freedom-fighters,' denying climate change, encouraging finger-pointing between and amongst us, all while blaming the current government for absolutely everything that's 'wrong?' with Canada. A national dental plan for low-income families and seniors? Wrong. A national pharmacare plan providing access for women to products and services that maintain bodily autonomy, or which support self-employed families (like mine) who don't not have health coverage and face debilitating medical debt? Nope. With nothing but three word slogans the Conservatives bait Canadians against one another pitting the so-called 'woke?' (presumably those seeking higher-order Maslow goals like fostering community wellness, belonging and support) against those who perceive it's the woke who are taking all of that away.

Here at home, we see the influence of the almighty dollar over all else. In Caledon, we're mandated to build homes faster, so developers are being granted significant leeway in development charges to support this initiative. At what cost? Less money flowing into municipal coffers to support parks, services and public transit, just a few examples of what actually makes a community the kind of community you actually want to live in. The federal Conservatives' 'Build the homes!' slogan aligns nicely with provincial conservatives 'Saving You Time Act,' that glosses over environmental and land expropriation concerns, making it easier for developers (who already own large swathes of land near the proposed 413 highway) to obtain even more of it, and to circumvent democratic processes put in place to protect landowners along the way.

For more on that, take a few moments to review Councillor Doug Maskell's motion before this past Tuesday's Council, asking it to not support the 413. Amongst a variety of reasons like environmental concerns, his motion also cites the issue of land expropriation including where 'the Building Highways Faster Act, in Section 13.9 authorizes the use of force to take possession of land owned by a Caledon resident.' Is it too far of a stretch to suggest the democratic right to vote Republican in the US or Conservative here at

home, gives us the right to vote in the end of democracy?

What does 'more' mean to Canadians? What are the implications of the US election here at home? I believe 'more' speaks to the most basic of human instincts. Not for us to rise to Maslow's pinnacle of the pyramid, achieving self-actualization, but rather, to survive at all costs even if that means blaming others. It means collectively, we're willing to permit things many of us find morally reprehensible, for the perceived notion of cheaper goods and services. My brother has an expression; 'follow the money.' Who is profiting from an electorate that is pitted against one another? Who profits from land expropriated without due process or construction completed without development charges? What is the real cost of the results of the American election, and the likely outcome of a Canadian one when it is eventually held? Average citizens will remain average and the rich will get richer. Communities will lack a feeling of community. We'll remain at the bottom of the pyramid. Beware the true costs of appealing to our more basic human nature.