

Standing on guard

by BROCK WEIR

Are you proud to be Canadian?

We in this country might not have a reasonably popular country song telling us that we should all take the same amount of pride in our red-and-white as our neighbours to the south do in their red-white-and-blue, but the answer on our side of the border was very often a given.

?Of course,? is sometimes the reflex answer, with some of the reasons for the affirmative response proving particularly telling.

If your answer is indeed yes, people usually cite the persons who gave, give, or have given back to the country we call home to such an extent they have become international icons. Terry Fox, often comes to mind, and following his return to the spotlight this past weekend at the Glastonbury festival, Michael J. Fox does as well. Rick Fox doesn't often pop up in the conversations I have, but, then again, I'm not a huge sports nut, so that's not a huge surprise ? but I digress?

Others cite Canada's work as International Peacekeepers, as scientific and technological innovators, as celebrated figures in the arts and culture communities.

Then there are those luck-of-the-draw things that are part and parcel of this country that make us proud like summer heat and winter snow; clear, cool and refreshing lakes, streams and other bodies of water, and majestic mountains. Well, we had nothing to do with that, really, except for water protection, but there's nothing wrong with revelling in our great, good natural fortune.

For others, evaluating pride in one's country can be a rather more difficult and emotional process, but it's always a worthwhile exercise of exploration.

Still more take pride in what Canada is not ? most often, this comparator is the United States ? but more on that later.

Unfortunately for me and my own Canada Day experience, I woke up on July 1 feeling a bit under-the-weather, so my own contributions to the veritable sea of red and white we're surrounded by every time the holiday rolls around were rather limited.

Instead, my own infusion of Canadian pride came on June 30.

Meeting friends in city, the decision was made to swing by the Toronto Pride Parade for the first time, at least for me, in more than a decade. Aside from perhaps a shift towards the political as international calamities continue befall us, little had changed content-wise from my perspective in the intervening decade.

One group of participants, however, spoke to me as a particularly Canadian moment. That is when a contingent representing LGBTQ+ individuals from a diverse array of African countries who were now in Canada experiencing their first ever Pride Parade. The fact that they've only been able to live as their authentic selves here so far away from home ? even if that wasn't their primary driver to move from Kenya, as one of the very prominent flags being waved indicated ? spoke volumes to me about who we are as a nation. And what it means to have the ?Canadian Experience.?

But recent polls suggest that however you define the Canadian Experience, such experience isn't what it once was.

In many ways, the results of a recent Leger poll of 1,607 Canadians in the lead-up to Canada Day, which showed that ?national pride is lower than it was a few years ago,? didn't surprise me, given the divided nature of our politics and how some have co-opted our flag for movements of varying legitimacy.

The results suggest the vast majority of us ? 76 per cent ? would call ourselves proud Canadians,? said CTV News of the poll results. ?But 45 per cent of people who did the survey said they were feeling less proud than they did five years ago in 2019. Leger said that's up 16 per centage points from 2021, when they posed the same question. Respondents were asked to choose from a list of things that make them proud to be Canadian. The country's natural beauty topped the list, followed by universal health care, freedom, and equality, a peaceful and safe society and multiculturalism.

?Just one in five said their fellow Canadians made them feel proud. Long wait lists, lack of family doctors, and overburdened emergency rooms that have made headlines across the country in recent years are taking a toll on our collective pride in medicare. The state of the healthcare system was near the top of the list of concerns for respondents, second only to economic inequality and poverty as the thing that made people feel least proud to be Canadian. Coming in third on that list: the current federal government.

?The vast majority of people who chose the Trudeau Liberals as a top concern also said they were backers of the federal Conservatives, the poll said. In fact, Conservative voters were more likely to say they're less proud to be Canadian than they were five years ago, with 65 per cent agreeing with that statement, compared to just 26 per cent of Liberal voters, 41 per cent of NDP supporters, and 36 per cent of those who back the Bloc Quebecois.?

The report notes that 94 per cent of Liberal voters said they're proud to be Canadian, while, for NDP voters, this figure stood at 88 per cent.

As noted above, given the divisive nature of our homegrown politics in the last decade, the partisan figures should come as no surprise. Personally, however, I was both concerned that the current state of our public health system figured so prominently in this survey of public opinion ? but, in an odd way, I was also optimistic in the fact that (a) people care and (b) it is fixable.

Following last week's byelection in Toronto, political change feels to be in the air in one way or another, no matter what point in the political spectrum you fall upon, whether you're buoyed by the inroads the Conservatives are making, hopeful that the Liberals might make an invigorating change at the top, or pleased the federal NDP are flexing policy muscle.

By and large, therefore, our political system is functioning as it should. But what of our neighbours?

On Canada Day, the American Supreme Court took it upon themselves to completely redefine the role of President, giving the office-holder alarming new powers that have and will have implications on every American citizen at home and abroad.

All we can do here in Canada is sit back and see how this all unfolds. Or is it?

As personally disappointing as I found the court's decision to be, one of the few silver linings I could find in the situation was the system of checks and balances we continue to enjoy in Canada, and it continues to function as it should.

And that, as it happens, gave my own feeling of Canadian Pride on the Nation's Birthday a shot in the arm.

But we'll only be able to continue to enjoy this by staying aware, staying engaged, and keeping apprised of any threats to this system as they arise.

In short, we must stand on guard for what we're proud of.