

Stay tuned and don't touch that dial

by BROCK WEIR

Sometimes, as I've been trying to fall asleep lately, I can't help but chuckle about the possibility of waking up to the dulcet sounds of Cher and Sonny Bono the following morning.

It's not that I don't already have a propensity to still listen regularly to the so-called 'Goddess of Pop', as she wears the deserved mantle well, but rather the sense that the following morning might start like any other.

If you're a movie or comedy buff, you know Sonny and Cher's 'I Got You Babe' was the welcome wake-up call for Bill Murray's weatherman, Phil Connors, in the 1990s classic Groundhog Day. Well, it was a welcome sound at first, it became less and less so with each passing day as it came out of his clock radio. After all, every day was exactly like any other in this flick - spoiler alert, if you're about 31 years behind - until they weren't.

For the uninitiated, Murray's Phil plays a blustery weatherman sent to the Pennsylvania town of Punxsutawney, famous for its groundhog, also a Phil, for the rodent's big day - and a big day for superstitious sun-seekers.

As Phil - the rodent, not the man - gets ready to potentially observe his shadow and apparently change the trajectory of meteorology, Phil - the man, not the rodent - gets stuck in a time loop, reliving February 2 day after day until he can right some wrongs.

There are instances in all our lives for which we might want a bit of a do-over, but having to do it over every single day until you complete some sort of invisible puzzle, can, at best, get on your last nerve. Yet, in some respects, it feels like we're also caught in a loop.

This coming Tuesday, November 5, Americans are set to go to the polls in an election which, no matter how you slice it, will have far-reaching international implications.

Sadly, once again, this election all too often feels like a personality contest rather than one about substantive policy. Don't get me wrong, these always have something of a beauty pageant element, but it wasn't all that long ago where elections hinged on policy and vision rather than just who is pushing and promoting the vision, or who can excite or rile their base - or get people frothing to such an extent that they're voting against something rather than for something. That is, once again, pretty disheartening.

As the big day approaches, I was curious this past weekend to see what I wrote in the week before the 2016 Presidential Election.

Doing so, I couldn't help but be struck by how much things have changed - and how much things have not.

'Since the very beginning of this unlikely campaign, he has continually cited media 'elites' and power-brokers being the cause of all the controversy he has caused in his wake,' I wrote, the blank not too difficult to plug in. 'Clear bias,' he and his surrogates cry when referring to the so-called 'mainstream' media, despite the fact that nobody has played the media game better than him over the course of the bulk of my life. He has been a power player and he knows the ropes. Yet, he has found a core base of voters who see him as an outsider, someone who is fighting an uphill battle, someone who can be a change-maker, and it's fascinating to watch it unfold. His core uncritically latches onto buzzwords without exercising the critical thinking powers available to us all to see they are just words, completely devoid of meaning and, let's face it, when it comes to monikers, completely lacking in the catchiness and panache offered by politicians from elections of yore. It is, in the case of this man, easier to find a constituency eager to take just about everything spoon-fed to them as long as it fits into their already-set worldview at face value without giving it a moment's consideration.'

This column hit doorsteps on October 27, 2016 - and we all know what happened a week or two later.

We came through four years of those results, a small sliver in our collective human history in which a hell of a lot happened. Unrest continued around the world. Decisions were made for better or worse. A global pandemic changed the world. Another President was duly elected. And, with just a little under three months left in the President's turn, despite all these changes, upheavals, and events that have changed the trajectory of most of our lives in one way or another, here we are back at the starting line.

Allegations of bias are still being trotted out whenever the words uttered by the candidate and his surrogates come under scrutiny, there are denials of things we see and hear with our own eyes and ears, scapegoating is back and worse than ever, and positioning one's self as the poor, defenceless underdog once again, despite all evidence to the contrary?.

This re-heated perfect storm seems to be bringing out the worst in people, when these exercises in democracy should bring out the best. Hopefully it's not a sign that democracy as we know it, in and of itself, might be experiencing its last gasp south of the border.

In these last few days of the campaign, media outlets in the United States are often turning to get the opinions of voters who claim to be undecided ? although, once again, with such diametrically opposed visions being offered by both candidates, the idea of someone being undecided in one way or another by press time this week seems extraordinarily unlikely ? but that's nothing new.

If they do exist, perhaps it's a sign of voter fatigue or electoral exhaustion.

If I were a United States resident, let alone a citizen, I imagine living through all this would feel less like Groundhog Day, and more like being strapped into a human-sized hamster wheel ? spinning in place with nowhere to go and little opportunity to move the needle forward; although any little pitfall could, as has been demonstrated, pull the needle back.

It's nothing short of exhausting looking on, so spare a thought for the American voter this week.

My only hope is this process, and the fact that the United States has, for the last two decades, been living in a perpetual election cycle, doesn't deter voters from casting an informed choice. Given early voting figures, the numbers paint a motivated story, but a week is a long time in politics.

Stay tuned ? and resist the temptation to tune out.