

Un-muddled Mandates

by BROCK WEIR

Our language is a funny thing.

While English has done the trick for us for many centuries, it's something of a living document as we don't have officially-appointed individuals to monitor its usage and whether a new word or phrase becomes part of our collective lexicon.

We do, however, have multiple arbiters of such things ? the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) and Merriam-Webster being but two bodies who end the year by adding a new word or two to their respective tomes.

New to the latest volume produced by the OED for the year ahead was ?brain rot,? a noun which has been defined as ?supposed deterioration of a person's mental or intellectual state, especially viewed as a result of overconsumption of material (now particularly online content) considered to be trivial or unchallenging. Also: something characterized as likely to lead such deterioration.?

Whether or not you suffer from ?brain rot? I'll leave for you to self-diagnose. The choice offered by Merriam-Webster, however, is something we can all relate to: ?Polarization.?

Merriam-Webster defines the word as ?division into two sharply distinct opposites; especially, a state in which the opinions, beliefs, or interests of a group or society no longer range along a continuum but become concentrated at opposing extremes.?

We don't have to look very far to find examples of polarization in our day to day lives, particularly in our public discourse when it comes to the ?big stuff,? we're seeing it more and more with the ?small stuff,? which so many have forgotten not to sweat.

The US is experiencing heaps of both at the moment while the people, many of whom voted with their pocketbook in the supposed hope that a vote for the ultimate victor in the race would somehow lower grocery prices with the wave of some sort of magic pen, are feeling the impacts. At President Trump rolls back many human rights that were hard-fought by Americans, stoking no small amount of fear amongst large swaths of the populace, there are the distraction issues which nobody voted for ? such as a unilateral re-naming of the Gulf of Mexico, despite the fact that three nations share its shore. Nonsense.

There have been calls to coalesce around these changes ? and the person at the centre of power ? all in the name of national unity, but it often feels like the ones who are ripping up long-held playbooks, attacking long-serving and well-run institutions, and taking direct aim at significant segments of the population, are always the ones wailing for unity after sowing the seeds of division themselves.

Here at home, we're going through our own time of transition.

The Federal Parliament is currently prorogued while the governing Liberals find themselves a new leader. Some may have wanted a snap election rather than a leadership race, content to put themselves forward as an alternative to a Prime Minister who chose to ignore the writing on the wall and stay at the helm long after it was clear that he wouldn't be continuing in the role for very much longer ? whether at the will of his caucus or of the people.

Not many options were left to Trudeau following the pre-Christmas resignation of Chrystia Freeland, but given recent events south of the border, going down the leadership path was, in my view, probably the best option of the unenviable list that remained; it gives us a chance of some stability on the world stage, keeping some individuals with relevant experience at the table as we navigate the choppy waters of Trump Tariffs and threats to our independence.

An election, of course, is an inevitability once the new Liberal leader and, therefore, Prime Minister, is chosen by party faithful ?

but, it offers some degree of stability in the middle of what is otherwise a power vacuum at the worst possible time.

Then, there is Doug Ford who is no stranger to polarizing politics.

In the midst of long-term controversies on myriad subjects, including the developments of Highway 413, the Bradford Bypass, and all the scores of issues associated with both projects, to even his Government's controversial decision to forge ahead with the removal of cycling infrastructure from some Toronto streets, he recently ? and finally ? found a groove that crossed party lines: taking a strong stand against Trump and his seemingly bottomless and fatiguing font of threats.

Since those tariffs were first mooted, along with the ?idea? of Canada becoming the fifty-first state of the union, Ford, in my view, stepped up to the plate to provide a strong voice not just for the province, but the nation ? gee, it's almost as if he took notes from the last time we collectively weathered a Trump Tornado.

Yet, instead of staying on the file in the absence of permanent leadership elsewhere, he's made the decision to do away with that goodwill and leave yet another power vacuum, calling a snap election to give him a mandate to?.continue leading as the people hired him to do for a second time two-and-a-half years ago.

With an unassailable majority of 20-ish seats.

And a strong mandate that would be the envy of many a politician.

Despite this healthy majority and inspiring a degree of rare unity amongst opposition parties on protecting Ontario's cross-border trade and economy, an early election was called at his behest on Tuesday to ostensibly seek a somehow stronger mandate to keep calm and carry on.

Ford rides into this election with healthy poll numbers, which bodes well for he and his slate of candidates. The odds are in his favour and, following Election Day on February 27, we might not see significant change at Queen's Park. So, what's it all for?

That will be up to voters to decide, but I fear this decision to call an early election will erode our parliamentary system and pave the way for something of an ad-hoc style of government where governments are elected and dissolved to address Trump's threat du jour, or whatever winds blow our way.

In this environment, stability is the key, and going down that route for the next four years ? and, perhaps, beyond ? will leave us both exhausted and without a reliable rudder to navigate these unfavourable waters. I wonder if the OED will one day have a concise word for that.

We already know we're going to have a long four years ahead of us, no matter which leader and party wins here at home next month, or on the national level whenever that election comes to pass. We need our stability where we can find it.

Yet, what's done is done, and I thank all candidates who have stepped up to be a part of the democratic process and wish them all the best in presenting their visions for the Province to electors.

Now, it's on us to listen, think critically on all sides, and cast a vote that is most aligned with our own visions for the future.