

BROCK'S BANTER: Anxiously awaiting that final straw

By Brock Weir

This won't be news to you, of course, but you're a clever bunch.

With just a few hours to go before this week's edition of The Auroran goes to press, your message is loud and clear: It will take more than the worst mass shooting in American history to spur any action on tighter gun control legislation in the United States.

As of this writing, 100 per cent of you voted 'No' when asked if you thought recent events in Orlando would be seen by local lawmakers as a call to action.

There's no wavering there.

And there's no wavering among the American lawmakers, sadly.

On Monday, despite widespread support from the general public, whether registered Democrats, Republicans, Libertarians or Independent, the United States Senate decisively voted down a series of common sense measures which should have been in place years ago; namely, preventing suspected terrorists from buying guns and other weapons (such a novel idea) and putting in place tougher background checks so that guns don't fall into the hands of the wrong people.

Over the past week, we have seen no shortage of guns falling into the hands of the wrong people both inside and outside the United States.

There was, of course, the tragic attacks against the LGBTQ community at Orlando's Pulse nightclub, the horrible assassination of British Labour MP Jo Cox, an advocate for Britain staying in the European Union in the heat of the upcoming Brexit vote and, on the stranger side of things, the British fellow living in the United States who was arrested for trying to knock off Donald Trump by attempting to steal a gun from a police officer.

Most pundits south of the Border seemed distinctively nonplussed over the outcome. They have been to this rootin' tootin' gun shootin'ist rodeo more times than Yosemite Sam. It was a foregone conclusion.

'I was mortified by today's vote, but I am not surprised by it,' said Democratic Senator Chris Murphy in an interview with CNN.

'The NRA has a vice-like grip on this place.'

In the same piece, responding to a poll carried out by the news outlet showing the vast majority of Americans are in favour of these simple changes, he added: 'I don't think democracy allows for this Congress to be out of step with the American public for long.'

All too often, however, they have indeed found themselves out of step and Americans now seem to be marching to very different drummers.

Take, for instance, the meteoric and fascinating rise of both long-serving Senator Bernie Sanders and reality television personality Donald Trump (Home Alone 2: Lost in New York). The fact that these men are on diametrically opposing ends of the political spectrum is clear to anyone with at least one functioning eye or ear, but when you get past the finger pointing, bluster, and political blowhardery, they do have one uncanny similarity.

Both have tapped into something within the American public that has been too long untapped: dissatisfaction. And, with a broken two-party system, they didn't have anyone to come along and drill in a spigot, until this presidential campaign. Now, it is going to be very hard for anyone to turn off the flow.

Americans want 'change'? a lovely catch-all and they don't care where they have to go to find it.

The same can be said of some of the more rabid people slinging mud at each other in the Brexit debate, but that is a column for another day. Let's wait until the dust settles on that one.

Americans are tired of the business-as-usual way of running things. Sanders has taken on the mantle of taking down special interests like his oft-and-oft-and-oft mentioned Wall Street Fat Cats, while Trump is going after change for change's sake dancing around the issue of the NRA like Salome, unsure where it is most politically advantageous to let his veil-like hair drop.

Nevertheless, the reality is that these special interests, and the NRA in particular, do have these choke holds on one of the world's most enduring democracies and it doesn't matter how many students are shot, and it doesn't matter how many LGBTQ are mowed down while celebrating their pride in the process. Nobody in a position of power wants to rock the boat but, come November, perhaps they will have been cast overboard in a cresting wave.

The more I look with dismay at the process unfolding below our southern border, the more grateful I am for the system we have in place. Sure, it is flawed - no system is ever perfect - but it is certainly effective.

Since we're still in Pride Month, let's cast our minds back to 2004 when the Supreme Court of Canada made its historic ruling in favour of equal marriage. They deemed that the definition of marriage, from a civil standpoint, must evolve with society and that

equal marriage ultimately ?flows? directly from the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

It was a decision that was free of satisfying the needs of special interests groups in certain parties (and indeed represented in some quarters of all significant Canadian parties) holding onto outmoded tenets of a constitution set out in 1867 or, in the case of our southern friends, 1791.

I am sure many people were surprised to see some relevancy recently come out of our Parliament's Red Chamber over the debate concerning ?Right to Die? legislation.

In a rare move, the Senate, intended to be Canada's ?Chamber of Sober Second Thought? attempted to go toe-to-toe with the House of Commons over the legislation fighting for a number of changes stemming from their own debates, most notably a clause in the legislation which would have allowed doctor-assisted dying in cases where patients were not necessarily terminally ill but suffering nonetheless.

The Senate ultimately lost that particular battle, but their efforts re-entered an important part of the debate back into the public consciousness, as it did the Senate's own relevancy as an oversight body, a further check and balance, to our elected representatives in the House of Commons.

Their decisions, their views, and their suggestions to the House of Commons are no longer ? generally speaking ? beholden to a particular party's line, nor are they necessarily looking to score brownie points in their respective constituencies all with an eye of being re-elected in October 2019.

Their collective experiences, expert consultation, and sobriety in thought came together in an attempt to address the important needs of Canadians, a duty their American counterparts ? and elected counterparts, yet ? seem to have all but abdicated.

Democracy is a fragile thing. For all its flaws, ours seems to be working well at the moment, but we can only imagine how theirs will be working in the aftermath of the November election and the January inauguration of the ultimate victor.

With an appetite for change growling, from whatever corner it comes, one can only hope that will be enough to align gun control laws to the will of the people, and nobody else has to die while the world waits for them to catch up.