

BROCK'S BANTER: Reining in, Reigning out

Reining in the Red Chamber

By Brock Weir

I'm afraid we've crossed a final frontier and there is no turning back.

I was one of many two weeks ago who shook his head in dismay at a clip from MSNBC that went low-grade viral on YouTube of a particular news anchor cutting off an interesting discussion with a Congresswoman on an issue of the day for breaking news about Justin Bieber.

It seems the man who was once Stratford's proudest son was off to answer charges of drag racing, drinking and driving, and otherwise menacing his fellow Canadian snowbirds in Florida.

?This is where their priorities lie,? I thought to myself. Scrolling down the page, it became clear from the comments others felt the same way.

Nevertheless, I rested assured this would not follow suit in our own media north of the border, the frigid land that nurtured this fellow before releasing him out onto an unsuspecting world.

How wrong I was.

Settling into CBC News' flagship political program Power & Politics on Wednesday afternoon to take in the fallout from the leader of the Liberal Party of Canada to banish Liberal senators whence they came ? or, really, simply to nominally remove them from the traditional party caucus ? things were going along relatively smoothly.

Liberal pundits were hailing the move as Trudeau's first true, bold foray into a brave new world while others, particularly Conservatives, downplayed the move, attempting to downplay Stephen Harper's own undershooting of his goal to appoint zero senators by 59, falling back repeatedly on the argument a senate caucus by any other name would stink as sweet.

It was a stimulating conversation until they had the balls to segue from the story ?from Justin to Justin.? We were out of the corridors of power, to Toronto Police Headquarters, for the breaking news that the Biebs had, unlike Senators, come back whence he came to turn himself in for atrocities to ears the world-over?or assault, or something. (Admittedly, I quickly stopped paying close attention and, to tell you the truth, I don't particularly care, so either charge seems apt.)

Although I had tuned out, I still could not believe my eyes or ears as this particular item was deemed newsworthy enough to bump what could perhaps turn out to be a watershed moment in Canadian politics from a political program. Host Evan Solomon seemed equally amused ? and bemused.

Eventually, they wound back to the topic at hand and I tuned back in.

Evaluating both sides of the debate, I find the arguments of both the Liberals and the Conservatives compelling. Putting aside the hypocritical nature of the Conservatives' own Senate appointments aside, I can take in the perspective that this is merely a formality and doesn't necessarily change the fact these seniors remain Liberal in ideology and are likely to follow suit in their votes.

On the other hand, I think Trudeau's decision opened up a very positive can of worms. Amid the calls to abolish the Senate altogether, I have always believed that this would be too reactive to abuses by senators across all party lines ? as well as the people who put them there.

The principle of having another body to review legislation out of the heat of the House of Commons is a welcome buffer. A phrase we hear over and over again is the Senate acts a chamber of ?sober second thought.? This is how it would work in an ideal world, but this is not an ideal world.

Party lines and political appointments have resulted in this philosophy becoming nothing but a pipe dream, but if party lines were nominally abolished throughout the Senate, it would be a welcome step in the right direction ? freedom to exercise this sober second thought without being beholden to a government or leader of the day.

Trudeau's bold decision is not the only change to consider in Canada's red chamber. The room, of course, is headed by a pair of thrones ostensibly occupied by the Governor General and his or her Consort. But these are also the thrones occupied by the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh.

REIGNING OUT

As this issue of The Auroran hits the streets on February 6, it will be exactly 62 years to the day that King George VI died and his daughter, Princess Elizabeth, becoming not only Queen of the United Kingdom, but also Queen of Canada.

As a lapsed fan of Monty Python, whenever those figures are mentioned, my mind immediately envisions the racetrack where

dozens of Queen Victorias, complete in mourning black, white veil, and a precariously perched tiny crown are leaping over fences and other obstacles to take the lead.

With each passing year, my mind's eye turns back there with an additional Queen, complete with hat and handbag, entering the course, quickly gaining on the Queen Victorias en route to beat her 63.5-year record as monarch in 2015.

Between now and then, however, I wonder how much of this office will change in Canada. Speculation on the future went into fever pitch throughout most of January as it was announced the Prince of Wales and Duchess of Cornwall were taking over more duties from The Queen and Duke of Edinburgh, who will be 88 and 93 this year respectively. It is an understandable move.

Speculation became even greater when Buckingham Palace announced a number of measures being taken to ease the 'transition' between monarchs, including the merging of their press office.

Finally, on January 16, the Governor General announced Charles and Camilla would be making their first visit to Canada as a couple this May, and Charles' 18th individual visit, paying calls on Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, and Manitoba to commemorate, among other things, the 150th anniversary of the Charlottetown Conference, a pivotal step on the road to Canadian Confederation in 1867.

It will be interesting to see the reception of this visit, considering the lacklustre reception the couple received on their 2009 visit and their comparatively rapturous return engagement in 2012 to mark the Diamond Jubilee.

But it will also be interesting to see what the next steps will be in this inevitable transition. In a matter of just a few years, the number of people in Canada who have known no other monarch as Canada's head of state in their lifetimes has rapidly become the majority.

When one stops to think about the level of commitment, it is almost staggering to comprehend the Queen made her 21st birthday commitment to dedicate her life to what was to become the Commonwealth a whopping 67 years ago this spring - and just a year off in age from Justin Bieber. How's that for some perspective?

A similar commitment was made at a similar age by the Prince of Wales when formally invested with the title in 1969. Despite what transpired in his personal life, I believe his is a commitment he has followed with nearly equal dedication to his mother.

Sure, he has been derided for having occasional conversations with plants, his messy personal life, or what some consider an old-fashioned approach to life, but he has consistently demonstrated an ability to read the public consciousness in the United Kingdom, Canada, and the rest of the Commonwealth, and consistently being ahead of the rest of the world when it comes to environmental, sustainability, and human rights matters.

Case in point: his bold stance against climate change doubters last week, dubbing them the 'headless chicken brigade' turning a blind eye to mounting proof. Fasten your seatbelts!