

BROCK'S BANTER: Rock the Boat

By Brock Weir

Just when you're starting to become complacent again on being Canadian, something inevitably comes at you out of the blue ? and often with tremendous force ? that revitalizes, re-energizes, and renews one's quiet pride in our humble nation.

That ?something? hit me full force Thursday night as I settled into a great night of television. First up, was the inaugural ? and perhaps only ? full debate of Canada's 2015 Federal Election.

This event, hosted by Macleans and its parent company, Rogers, had what might ultimately turn out to be the singular distinction of attracting all four leaders of all four national parties.

The second event was the first in what promises to be a lengthy series of debates featuring the men vying to lead the American Republican party in their 2016 Presidential Election.

As I left the campaign office of local Liberal candidate Leona Alleslev for an interview this week on Thursday morning, I asked, ?Are you looking forward to the debate tonight?? She replied with a laugh, ?Which one??

I was here to see our own political leaders square off, as was she, but there was also a part of me yearning to turn into Fox's non-fiction arm to see how the viable Republican candidates would fare against perceived frontrunner Donald Trump, and how far the hirsute billionaire would go to turn this episode into even more of a sideshow than he already has.

Once the Canadian debate wrapped around 10 p.m., and having reached my saturation point in post-debate analyses hosted by CBC News and Omni Television, I fired up the good ole' PVR to see the Grand Ol' Party circus.

And it did not disappoint.

As I watched the event unfold, I was not struck so much by the vitriol, bombast, and one-upmanship that has become a hallmark of the Trump campaign ? so much so the influential American arm of the Huffington Post has made the bold decision to segregate the bulk of its Trump coverage into the bin of their Entertainment section ? but what they actually talked about.

As a Canadian comfortable living in the 21st century, it became increasingly baffling to this viewer that the issues dominating their discussions were actually relevant talking points in this day and age, particularly social conservatism and the role religion plays in informing their governing and decision-making styles.

I don't discount the importance religion evidently plays in the personal lives of each of the men standing on stage, or indeed the importance religion plays in the personal lives of everyday people the length and breadth of North America, but to hear it so boldly and explicitly stated in how it would inform how each and every one of them would lead one of the world's great superpowers was mildly unsettling.

Personally, I thought all bets were off near the end of the debate when the popular (and, following the debate, long-suffering) moderator Megyn Kelly asked (on behalf of a viewer, to be fair) how God has spoken to them during the course of the campaign. Pretty confident God has better things to do with his or her time than to be an armchair quarterback to politicians, regardless of party stripe, I was braced for the worst ? but didn't ultimately get it.

Nevertheless, it made me proud of how things were handled on the north side of the border.

Instead of the Trump sideshow, we got a well-moderated, fairly well-reasoned and thoughtful debate with our party leaders on real, relevant issues that matter to Canadians.

Following the broadcast, each leader wasted no time in hopping on social media to declare themselves the victor, with varying degrees of evidence to bolster their respective claims, but the real victors were Canadians themselves.

Each of the four demonstrated their clear personal strengths, their shortcomings, and where they can make improvements. I'm confident it proved to be a valuable evening for those currently sitting on the electoral fence ? and, with 10 weeks left in the campaign, I'd wager the fence-sitters are in pretty good company at the moment ? and revitalized the party faithful to hit the pavement even more.

That is, of course, if viewers weren't completely blotto if they came up with a drinking game every time Mr. Harper and Mr. Mulcair dodged a pointed lob in their general direction, Ms. May prefaced an argument with ?All due respect? (This is a Federal debate. How much respect is actually due?) or Mr. Trudeau basically called the incumbent a liar.

As the campaigns and debates roll on ? even if they can never get all four party leader in the same room again ? I expect more of the same. Voters, however, would be best served if this quartet was able to steer out of a rut they have found themselves in.

Conservative Stephen Harper has from the outset ? and, truth be told, from the outset of the last two Federal campaigns as well ? stressed that Canadians want to ?stay the course.? Inevitably, the others vying for the top job have sent considerable amount of time

explaining why it is not such a great idea to stay on a course they see on a downward slope. Wouldn't it be nice if this phrase was consigned to the history books, if only to hear what the landmarks might be on the course ahead, regardless of which prong Canadians ultimately decide to explore on this fork in the road? Hearing Canadians want ? or do not want, as the case might be ? more of the same is simply not inspiring, nor will it give voters any reason to turn out to the polls. Chart your respective visions, tell Canadians what they have to look forward to, and why they should vote for you, not why they shouldn't vote for the other guy or gal.

?Don't rock the boat,? is not reason enough to get my vote but I'm open to all comers.

HUE (AND CRY?)

If you've been looking for a way to get up close and personal with this writer, you're in luck. Come out to the Aurora Cultural Centre on Saturday morning from 10.30 a.m. to 12.30 p.m. as a group of local artists ? Local Colour Aurora ? come together to metaphorically peel off my fully-clothed layers to reinterpret me on canvas. This will be the latest in a series of portraits of local Aurorans (including the Aurora Farmers' Market's Jan Freedman and Councillor Tom Mrakas) and paintings of local landmarks, which will be part of an exhibition at the Centre next month.

Be gentle, artists.