

POLITICS AS USUAL: The Last Debate

By Alison Collins-Mrakas

As my readers will know, I took some vacation time last week and went to Vegas for the third and final US Presidential Debate. For a political junkie like myself, it was a truly memorable trip.

Things started off well. Flight was on time, no issues with check in. As we booked our tickets spur of the moment, we couldn't get a direct flight so we had a stopover in Dallas and that, dear readers, is where the fun began.

On our plane were three 'Ladies for Trump.' It was my first experience with real, live Trump supporters. And they were both what I expected and not.

In terms of what I expected? Yes, they were fervent supporters. They really wanted you to know they really like Trump. Trump is America's savior and that is not mere hyperbole. That is true belief. Not happy to wear simply one button, they were festooned with buttons of support. I found, for the most part, the Trump supporters were quite vocal and obvious about their support, the Hillary supporters were much less so.

I did not see one person with a 'Hillary' button; though I did see one fellow with a 'Hillary 2016' t-shirt. And there was one lone die-hard Bernie supporter who was, according to his t-shirt, still 'feelin the Bern'?

In terms of what I didn't expect? Unlike the televised rallies shown ad nauseum on CNN, the individual Trump supporters I saw or met were not scary, screaming racists. Though quite forceful in their opinions and belief in all things Trump, they were not belligerently so. Well, until alcohol was involved and then, yes, they were incredibly obnoxious. But that is not just the realm of Trumpites.

When we landed, we intended to go straight to the hotel, head out to UNLV campus to experience the craziness, then back to the strip for one of the viewing parties hosted by various media. However, as we pulled out of McCarran Airport and headed towards the strip, we were hit with the reality of what security for a Presidential debate looks like.

Multiple access points to the campus were cordoned off with barricades on the roads stretching out for miles. There was an enormous and highly visible police presence. Unless you were prepared to walk for miles, you were not getting onto that campus. As an added security measure, the entire area around the Thomas Mack Centre (where the debate was being held) was ringed with shipping containers; essentially creating an impenetrable, nearly 10 foot high steel wall around the stadium. There was literally only one way in or out. The atmosphere around the stadium was intense to put it mildly.

We could see on the video screens on the way to our hotel, that there were already a number of noisy protests underway. The hotel concierge advised us not to attempt to get on campus as we would more than likely miss the debate if we did.

We had a choice of attending a watch party at the Cosmopolitan Hotel or the MGM Grand. Luckily, we chose to attend the Cosmo watch party instead as it was hosted by USA today. The MGM party? Hosted by Fox news. Yikes!

Say what you will about Americans, but they are engaged in politics. We were in a chi-chi bar, in a chi-chi hotel on a Wednesday night and it was quite literally jam packed with folks specifically there to watch a debate. On politics. And folks were actually listening to the debate. It wasn't just on in the background. People were actively listening to and then of course reacting to the candidates' answers.

I don't recall any downtown chi-chi Toronto bar hosting a 'debate watch' party during one of our elections. If they did, I doubt they'd get a crowd.

Though it was a non-partisan event, the crowd was overwhelmingly in support of Clinton. The few lone Trumpers were drowned out with boos every time they cheered on their guy. We were fortunate to sit with some wonderful ladies from Arkansas and Seattle and a few gentlemen from New York. Their reactions were pretty insightful. And a few unprintable. But entertaining for sure.

Far removed from the debate watch party and the UNLV campus, I took every opportunity I could to speak with regular people: cabbies, waiters, electricians, event staff. I was surprised by how knowledgeable and informed they are. These people are not uninformed. They know what the deal is. They are just too tired and beaten down by trying to make a living to openly campaign for one candidate or another.

In my unscientific poll of the nine folks I spoke with, not one supported Donald Trump. They all found him rather odious. But that does not mean that they all supported Hillary Clinton either. About a third thought she was the best candidate, but the other 2/3 were voting for her only because she was the lesser of two evils. Not exactly a ringing endorsement.

My takeaway from this?

Americans are fed up with the status quo. They don't see either of the candidates as the answer, but will go with the one that is at

least qualified to do the job over the one who is obviously and manifestly unfit to hold public office.
Election Day is next Tuesday. We shall see if I am right.