

What happens in America ?



By Nate Smelle

One of the best, most welcoming things about living in North Hastings is how people here tend to look out for their neighbours. As anyone who has ever found themselves stranded by the side of the road in the Bancroft area during the winter, with their car stuck in a snow bank knows, it doesn't take very long for someone to stop and push or pull you back on the road. You likely won't see the person again, however if you do cross paths in town or wherever, your shared memory of overcoming a struggle together will at the very least bring a smile to both of your faces. Whenever tragedy or an emergency arises, the people here are always ready to lend a hand. I like to think of this tendency towards kindness and compassion for one another in our times of need as being the defining character of our community's spirit?and for the most part it is?but, whenever I write about the negative influence and impact of Donald Trump and Trumpism on Canadians and Canadian values, it becomes abundantly clear that not everyone here shares this compassionate concern for our neighbours. And that's fine. Not all of us have to agree on politics. In a healthy democracy we need an inclusive diversity of political opinions to guide us forward on the path to progress. At the same time, we also must not turn our heads or bury them in the sand when we see our neighbours treading a dangerous path. Although it is our right, it is never in our best interest to remain silent when someone is about to hurt themselves or others. That is why we must not overlook the significant interconnectedness between Canada and the United States across multiple dimensions: economically, socially, and ecologically. To dismiss discussions of U.S. politics as irrelevant to a Canadian community publication fails to recognize the intricate relationships that shape life in Canada, particularly in areas like North Hastings where tourism is the ?bread and butter? for so many. Canada and the U.S. share one of the largest trading relationships in the world. For example, in 2022, two-way trade between the countries surpassed \$700 billion, illustrating the deep economic ties that bind them. Many communities in Canada, including Bancroft, are economically influenced by American markets. Throughout North Hastings, and all of Canada for that matter, many businesses may depend on trade with U.S. suppliers or customers, and fluctuations in U.S. economic policy can directly impact the Canadian economy. Policies set by the U.S. government regarding tariffs, trade agreements, or labour regulations can ripple through Canadian communities, affecting job availability and economic growth. In this context, discussing U.S. politics is not merely an exercise in political debate; it is a necessary examination of how decisions made south of the border can influence local economies in Canada. This is particularly relevant for communities like Bancroft, which may rely on cross-border trade or tourism from U.S. residents. Ignoring these ties in a local publication like ours, dismisses a critical component of our local economy in North Hastings. By examining U.S. political dynamics in our local newspaper from time to time, my intention is not to divide people further. In fact it is the opposite. By providing a platform for Canadians to engage critically with each other, my hope is to enhance our understanding of how these so called ?American issues? intersect with Canadian values and the policies our politicians try to sell us every four years or so. The notion that Canadians think for themselves does not negate the influence of neighbouring political climates; instead, it highlights the importance of informed discourse on these matters. Engaging with U.S. politics does not diminish Canadian autonomy; rather, it enriches the understanding of how global issues affect local realities. Ecologically, the relationship between

Canada and the U.S. is even more important. The two countries share vast natural resources and ecosystems, such as the Great Lakes, which provide drinking water to millions of people on both sides of the border. Recognizing that environmental policies in the U.S. have far-reaching effects on Canadian ecosystems, impacting issues like climate change, pollution, and conservation efforts, we cannot afford to pretend that what happens in U.S. politics stays in the U.S. For instance, just like the smoke from our wildfires does not stop drifting south at the Canadian/U.S. border, decisions made regarding fossil fuel emissions in the U.S. influences air quality and climate conditions in Canada, affecting everything from agricultural practices to public health. By exploring U.S. political issues, we foster a dialogue that can empower our fellow Canadians to think critically about their own policies and societal values. Therefore, rather than dismissing such discussions as irrelevant, it is essential to embrace them as a vital aspect of understanding the interconnected world in which we live. Like it or not, in nearly every federal election in Canada, the echoes of U.S. politics resonate loudly. What unfolds in America rarely stays there, and that's why I cannot heed the advice of those who suggest we ignore the rising influence of figures like Donald Trump and the ideologies that support them. When Prime Minister Justin Trudeau called a snap election in August 2021, he deftly navigated the surge of anti-democratic sentiment that had begun to flow northward after Trump incited his supporters to storm the Capitol on Jan. 6 earlier that year. Despite losing some seats, Trudeau's government recognized the emergence of a 'Maple MAGA' movement, allowing them to prevent a Conservative Party veering sharply to the far right from gaining power. However, following the dramatic start to 2022—marked by the Canadian version of the MAGA insurrection poorly named the 'Freedom' convoy—the Conservative Party of Canada opted to embrace this troubling trend. They ousted their moderate leader, Erin O'Toole, and instead installed Pierre Poilievre, who aligns himself with the same politics of hate and conspiracy theories that have defined Trump's political career. Poilievre's election signifies a significant shift for a party that once stood for the values my grandparents' and likely yours' cherished. His political strategy, which mirrors Trump's 'Dictatorships for Dummies' playbook, became evident early in his leadership bid. Rather than allowing his fellow Conservatives a fair choice, he resorted to underhanded tactics, including financing legal challenges against Patrick Brown, one of his primary opponents. Could this example of dirty politics have something to do with why Poilievre refuses to apply for top-level security clearance? Nonetheless, his ruthless approach exemplifies a troubling trend: a move towards a politics defined by dishonesty and aggression, which again, can be aptly described as 'Trumpian.' As we continue to witness the rapid unraveling of Trump and the MAGA movement in the U.S., it's crucial for Canadians to pay attention. Initially, Trump's unorthodox persona attracted many voters disillusioned with traditional politics. Yet the Democrats squandered an opportunity in 2016 by sidelining Bernie Sanders, opting instead for Hillary Clinton. This misstep led to four tumultuous years under a president whose behaviour and actions shocked the world. For those still hoping Trump's brand of politics could succeed in Canada, history provides a clear warning: fascist politics never yield positive outcomes. The signs are evident in Trump's recent speeches, where his lack of substance is becoming glaringly delusional. When in your lifetime have you ever heard of a major political candidate holding a town hall meeting, then denying the town' their potential constituent' the opportunity to ask questions, just so they could 'dance' on stage for 40 minutes? What may sound amusing at first' a rambling and deranged rant about immigrants eating pets, for example' masks the hateful energy driving his MAGA movement. Recent incidents, such as his personal attacks on Vice President Kamala Harris and mockery of President Biden's stutter, highlight a troubling descent into a dark and divisive rhetoric. Is this the leadership we want to emulate? As Trump's poll numbers decline, his increasingly bizarre behaviour becomes more dangerous. Like a wild animal caught in a trap, desperation can provoke a violent response, and such unpredictability poses real risks. Risks we know that are not worth our time or energy. History teaches us that aspiring dictators must be held accountable before their influence spreads further. Fortunately, the growing emptiness at Trump's rallies indicates a broader fatigue with his divisive politics. If the Conservative Party of Canada wishes to compete effectively in the 2025 election, they must reconsider their alignment with this 'Maple MAGA' strategy. A return to core Canadian values is essential, emphasizing inclusivity and respect rather than division and animosity. Ultimately, the trajectory of Trump and the MAGA movement reminds us that, as I have said before, when presented with a choice, people often prefer joy over hate and truth over lies. Canadians have a crucial opportunity to resist the encroachment of toxic politics, fostering a political environment that reflects our shared values. Let's take this moment to ensure that our political discourse celebrates unity rather than division. If we fail to learn from the mistakes south of the border, we risk repeating history. As we look ahead, let's choose a path that honours the principles of democracy and humanity, steering clear of the dark alleys of hate-fueled politics. The lessons are clear: to protect our democracy and our values, we must remain vigilant and engaged with politics here in Canada, the U.S., and around the globe; because, as I have said before, what happens beyond our borders, does not stay within our borders.