

THE CORNER OFFICE

The Woes of Leviathan – South of the Border

Thank God for turmoil! Otherwise Wolf Blitzer of CNN would be peeling potatoes in Donald Trump's situation room kitchen. With that bit of sarcasm duly noted let me kindly turn to the ongoing dilemmas burdening our American friends. Change, historical or otherwise, is best measured gradually if it is to be effectively beneficial to the whole. The onslaught of change through the smoke and mirrors found in chaos only brings repetition and invariably – no change.

Such is currently the case in the American political and social spectrum in that the tsunami that just hit the political landscape reflects the state of crisis that country finds itself in during these times. Unlike Canadians our cousins to the south tend to be more introspective and are quick to indentify their social ills. Here is a partial list of these ills which make up the current American crises and which we see on the nightly news:

Crisis 1) Obesity

- If Gordon Gekko's "Wall Street" ditty "Greed Is Good" identified the will of 80's crowd then obesity must be Great because it is wildly popular in defining today's population. Fat "for lack of a better term" is not productive and medically expensive for the economy at large. How many Chinese are breaking weigh scale records and guess who has the second largest and soon to be largest economy in the world?

Crisis 2) Drugs

- "Prop 19" just died on the ballot in California. A Big deal? Probably not since it likely reflects that the older generation still outranks the younger generation. But, the emplacement of recreation/addictive drugs in American society indicates a growing flaw in the nation's character. The long term effects have to be debilitating and thus far all attempts to eradicate or even control the problem have failed. Utterly failed.

Crisis 3) Illegal Immigration

- WOW! Thirteen million makes our yearly Tamil arrivals look like a drop in the proverbial bucket. Depending upon which "bitch and moan" factor is holding forth on the nightly news this problem does not appear to have a solution which will satisfy the population at large. It bespeaks the cultural and racial bitterness ingrained in the reality of today's American ethnicity. "Good Fences Make

Good Neighbours” – the U.S. didn’t think so in Berlin but, then Mexico is different, isn’t it?

Crisis 4) Unemployment

- Two years after “yes, we can” the gut-wrenching recession is still gut wrenching to a very large portion of the American unemployed or near un-employed population. This issue and probably this issue alone accounted for the G.O.P. sweep in the mid-terms. And worse is the lack of progress as time drives on and the likelihood of improvement is small in the near and mid-term. Could it be that this masks a fundamental and permanent shift in employment standards as the country moves towards a service economy? When does the boat sail for India?

Crisis 5) Bullying

- Pathetic abuse – that sums up the act of bullying which these days seems to be taking a more severe toll than in days gone by. Yet, while damnable in practice this crises didn’t seem to hit the nightly news until the visible victims turned out to be gay. While none of it is right it is interesting to note that this “crisis” only gained the necessary notoriety as a result of another “crisis”. And one begat another.....etc.

Crisis 6) Education

- Probably, “or lack thereof”, the international rankings (particularly in Math and Science) have placed the U.S. way down the list – and falling. This situation has been developing for quite some time but, has now seriously hit the headlines as U.S. jobs are now a major export. And, of course, the heart of the problem lies in the internal ethnic divisions of the country. Fixing that factor will most certainly take time and focus; how will that “time and focus” impact those pesky international rankings”?

Crisis 7) Politics

- Undoubtedly, the political spectrum is the mother lode in American crises management. The deterioration of hands-across- the-aisle co-operation has been developing over a long period of time. The increasing number of diverse voices has cut political civility to the quick and the ensuing bitterness on social, economic and security issues has finally and effectively locked down the process of government.

Those voices, mentioned earlier, are evolving in a pattern that is as difficult to follow/analyze as the statistical side of baseball. Trying to find some common thread of leadership in either political party has become the art of the impossible. The Republican 2012 candidate is going to be faced with traversing the tract of the centre right, the far right & the extreme right. And when she/he does so the object of the disaffection will be literally anything the Obama Democrats have brought to the table in the last four years.

Gridlock – no, it’s really toilet seat politics and it is one or two flushes away from a very dangerous and toxic backup.

Crisis 8) Debt

- Well, what can you say as the national number approaches the gross domestic product? How quickly we seemed to vault through the “billion” word to “trillion” speak – how do you spell “Ga-zillion” anyway? And how likely is it that either party has the will to tackle spending and government infrastructure? Is there a “Great Britain” in the cards or raising retirement benefits till age 70 or 75? Maybe the Chinese have the answer since they hold so much of the damned paper. This crisis, so quick in the making, will be long born by many generations ahead.

And finally, where does all this lead, when will it end? Or, is it THE END? I think there are more of us out there taking a closer look at our southern cousins and truly wondering whether this economic, social and political juggernaut can pull itself away from the abyss. Looking at the Americans look at themselves in a continuing state of crisis on so many different fronts and levels gives the ever eternal optimist – aka The Securities Broker – much pause. Some empires fall quickly, some stagnate – none has a “forever” track record.

If the deterioration of the nation continues, the list of crises will increase and the enemy will soon be at the gate. So, who is the enemy? “We Trust in God”, but they ARE out there.

Boots on the ground, cuz! This time it’s in your own backyard.

P.S.

- 1) Just so you know, in Canadaland we are subject to much of the same.

- 2) Terrific, insightful article in the Nov. 6th issue of the National Post by William Hanley (US has lifeboats, but still a Titanic).
See page 6 of F.P. Investing. Worth a read.

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