

Our American friends are trouble

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"The Americans are our best friends, whether we like it or not." That comment, made a half century ago by a now forgotten Ottawa politician, ranks as the best malapropism in our history. That muddled thought expressed one of the great Canadian truths: We need the United States, no matter what.

But do the Americans need us any more? Do they remember that their best friends are up here? Some officials in Washington are talking of building a fence or a wall at key points along the border to keep out Canadian "terrorists" or people smugglers. Unmanned Aerial Vehicles, (still) unarmed pilotless drones, fly above the routes used by illegals to gain entry to the U.S. And in this difficult economic climate, Canadian trade to the United States has fallen by 30 per cent, back to pre-NAFTA levels. That means that U.S. importers are buying less of the products we produce. Best friends, of course, but maybe the Americans no longer think of us that way.

But is this a bad thing? Maybe not. The American people are in one of their periodic fits of national madness, their psyche unravelling before our gaze. President Barack Obama, hailed by the world as a saviour in 2008, is now widely and justly portrayed as someone out of his depth as a national leader, completely in over his head, with his foreign policy in tatters, his direction of the national (and global) economy stumbling and unsure, and his popular support falling week by week, even among African-American voters. A recent insider's book tells of his key economic officials telling each other no one's in charge, and it certainly seems that way. A one-term Obama presidency, almost unthinkable 24 months ago, now seems possible, even likely.

But the Democrats' one saving grace is that their political opposition, the Republicans, are completely obdurate and utterly oblivious to reality, the Tea Party faction controlling their every move as they spout Bible Belt economic and religious nostrums. Congress is paralyzed, and the jostling among presidential wannabes grows ever fiercer. But what a list of potential candidates: Ron Paul, Herman Cain, Michele Bachmann, Newt Gingrich, Rick Perry, Mitt Romney. That roster is so terrifying, so packed with utter nonentities, that Romney actually seems the best of the lot, even if he is damned in the eyes of many in his party because, as governor of Massachusetts, he passed a medicare bill not all that dissimilar to Obama's. Shame, sir, shame! What a cadre of nobodies, a list to make the world tremble at the prospect of one of them directing the Shrunken States of America. Even the candidates for NDP leader here — Topp, Mulcair, Dewar — have more substance. Hell, even the NDP's interim leader, Nycole Turmel, has more charisma and brains than any one of those Republicans.

If the world's fiscal situation weren't so serious, we could all laugh at the Americans and their blustering incompetence and political games. But their ossified Congress means there can be no serious or sustained action to tackle the U.S.'s economic problems, even while the Secretary of the Treasury admonishes the European Union and the Euro-bankers to get their act together to find a solution to the Greek debt woes (and those of Italy, Spain, Portugal, etc., etc.). The global economy and world stock markets go down the tubes while the Tea Party in Washington and Podunk sets the pace on the road to ruination. What a farce.

Maybe the idea of an American-built wall along the Canada-U.S. border is not such a bad idea after all. Not to keep our "terrorists" out of the Republic, but instead to keep the Americans and their dysfunctional governmental ideas, their wild-eyed politicians, their preachers, and their rabid Fox commentators out of Canada. Canadians have become used to the idea of believing that we are dull and boring and that everything exciting happens south of the 49th Parallel. It is certainly true that there is some excitement in watching a great nation flush its substance away, but I'll take dull and boring any day, thank you very

much. Build that wall high, not that it will protect us from the worst of the folly down south. And by the way, best friends, whether we like you or not, you can pay for it yourselves. If you can afford it.

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