

POLITICS AS USUAL: Ides of March

By Alison Collins-Mrakas

'Beware the Ides of March'? A prophetic warning uttered by a soothsayer to the ever paranoid Caesar. But he failed to heed the portents and that led to his ultimate demise: stabbed to death by the very people he assumed supported him, chief among them his closest confidante, Brutus.

Shocked by the betrayal of those whom he thought were in support, he died uttering the famous last words (well, according to Shakespeare at least), 'Et Tu Brute.' ('You also, Brutus?')

It's March 15, the Ides of March, as I write this column; it just also happens to be the Super Tuesday of the US presidential primaries. On the Republican side, the winner take all contests in Ohio and Florida take place today, with over 200 delegates in play, as well as three other states with proportional delegates up for grabs.

The Democrats have a number of states in play as well, but they are always proportional. It is unlikely to be a lopsided win on the Democratic side so the awarding of delegates either way will not change the delegate count too wildly; unless, of course, the polls are wildly wrong. And they have been all along.

It is the Republican circus that we are all watching, hoping against all hope that the so-called frontrunner will meet his own Ides of March moment when folks will finally reach the point where they say enough is enough. And, unlike Trump, I mean that metaphorically folks, not literally.

Although given the violence at his rallies over the weekend, including someone rushing the stage upon which Trump was speaking, the likelihood of serious harm coming to someone at his events is escalating.

Pundit after pundit, candidate after candidate on both sides of the aisles were expressing abject horror about the disgusting display of violence that Trump's extreme demagoguery has wrought. Images of police on horseback pepper spraying protesters, a Trump supporter sucker punching an African American protester, a near riot in Chicago between Trump supporters and anti-Trump protesters and on and on.

Regardless of what one thinks about who started what? and there is some culpability on both sides? the scenes we are witnessing at Trump's rallies are truly frightening, not just for what they are, but for what they portend.

While it is indeed distressing, it is not a surprise. The tension has been building to a boil for quite some time. The only surprise, to me at least, is that someone hasn't been shot yet at one of these rallies.

Trump has spewed vile venom and hateful, dangerous comments literally from the day he announced he was running for office, and yet he has been given pretty much a free pass by almost everyone.

I believe that at first it was because he was seen as merely a joke candidate, but things have changed. He is still a joke, but a very dangerous one. That should have been obvious months ago.

His incendiary rhetoric should have resulted in outright condemnation by every talking head, every party leader, frankly everyone with a pulse.

But it didn't.

He has been allowed instead to up the ante. His poll numbers embolden him to say ever more hateful and dangerous statements.

Why is he given near 24/7 coverage? Because he generates huge viewership? and that means millions upon millions of advertising dollars. As Leslie Moonves, CEO of CBS said, 'It may not be good for America, but it's damn good for CBS.'

It's a modern version of 'if it bleeds it leads' approach to media. And it's appalling.

Regardless of the outcome of tonight's primary races, the state of American politics and the political party he says he represents has been irrevocably damaged by Donald Trump.

Given the vital importance of the US to our economy, my only hope is he doesn't bring the entire country down with him.