

THE UBYSSSEY

Mr. Rosenfeld goes to Washington: learning to love UBC's political apathy

By: [Arno Rosenfeld](#) - October 2, 2013

There's something rather strange about travelling around this city. Looking out the window on the bus, you see the headquarters of the World Bank, the CATO institute, Gallup, and suddenly these amorphous purveyors of policy and insight — normally just words in news articles — are made strangely real.

But aside from the giddiness you get from seeing a sitting senator jog by on the national mall — hey, there's Pat Toomey, sweat pouring down his workout clothes, legs protruding at odd angles from shorts far too revealing for a man of his age, as he heaves his way past tourists — you face a realization that this is where politics happen.

Then, in a moment of darker realization, it occurs to you that that senator, along with some of the other various suits scurrying from one government building to the next, occasionally stopping into pricey lounges for noon drinks, are the people responsible for the current shutdown of the federal government.

In the last issue of *The Ubyyssey*, we [ran an article](#) about the problem with political apathy at UBC. Students, it seems, are too busy, too distracted, too uncaring, too priced off of campus and out of the community to organize protests, vote in elections or stage the acts of civil disobedience that characterized campus protests on the Vancouver campus in years past.

We portrayed this “death of the activist” as a problem. But being back in America, I realized that political action run amok is almost as nearly as problematic as its absence.

The shutdown of the American government has consequences that are both blunt — no more inspections of imported food and drugs — and more abstract — as in, it could force the United States and possibly the rest of the world back into a recession. And the government was driven to this point by legislators who, simply put, care too much. Legislators elected by voters who, likewise, care too much.

These legislators — one a dentist who suddenly decided to run for congress — are so passionate about gutting America's measly attempt at creating affordable healthcare that they have no qualms about destroying the rest of the country in their quest to eliminate it.

Frankly, we'd all be better off if conservative Americans and their elected representatives were a little more apathetic about this whole Obamacare thing.

Sure, some low-income Americans won't be bankrupted by unexpected surgeries or diseases, and that makes your blood boil. But hey, instead of forcing millions of government employees and services and the full faith and credit of the United States of America to ride on whether or not you can bring this new entitlement to its knees, maybe you should just return to ATVing, loading up on credit-card debt and washing your fried cheese balls down with a few cold ones.

Yes, a (somewhat) liberal president — and a black one at that! — scored a legislative victory, ensuring that tens of millions of American citizens will be forced to fork money over to private corporations, but hey, Larry the Cable Guy is telling fart jokes on one of your 700 television channels — life ain't so bad after all.

There's tremendous reason to encourage political activity, especially on college campuses. It would be awesome to see passionate students standing up for good causes. It's quite a shame that, while the *Ubysey* archives are chock-full of photos of students marching around with signs, braving the rain to make their voices heard, such protests have been few and far between in the last several years.

But there's a danger in the masses mobilizing, or even small groups mobilizing. In my role as the token American on this newspaper of (mostly) poutine-eating, hockey-loving, over-friendly Canucks, I feel some responsibility to warn my North American brethren that unless you're knowledgeable, reasonable and advocating for a just cause, maybe you should stay out of the political realm.

All those who advocate for increasing voter turnout and political activity without qualifying that said voters and populace be well educated on the issues and learned in the ways of not destroying your federal government over a pet peeve political cause are dead wrong.

After observing the rise of the Tea Party, which follows in a long line of horrible American political passion — the genocidal settlers of the American West, the Confederacy, the KKK, America Firsters, the anti-bussing movement of the 1960s, evangelical anti-gay activists, gun rights advocates, those insisting on inserting creationism into textbooks, those still trying to block minorities from voting and women from getting abortions, to name just a small few — and their ability to destroy my government from within, I'm increasingly convinced that Canada's toned-down political culture has its merits.

Take the Wild Rose Party in Alberta, the conservative fringe of Canada's conservative fringe. They want to privatize the provincial healthcare system in Alberta, the Texas of Canada. Even in the right-wing bastion of Canada, that position is seen as radical. Yet there's a portion of mainstream America that refuses to support the expansion of privatized healthcare. A portion of American politicians are shutting down the entire federal government to oppose such an action.

Texas Senator Ted Cruz, who was born in Calgary and spent the early years of his life with his parents in the Alberta oil fields, is the main crusader behind the current government shutdown. He holds positions that would presumably get him (rightfully) laughed off the stage even at a Conservative Party event in his native province, and yet us suckers down south have embraced him with open arms.

America's founders were onto something when they tried to limit the country's democratic elements to an elite (they were wrong in confining that elite to white, landed males, but I digress). They recognized that telling children reared on rotted moral values and uneducated in the ways of government and history they could be anything they wanted might have disastrous consequences. And if we take that dentist-cum-congressman as any example, it looks like they were right.

Since then we've reformed the founders' limited democracy in ways good (you don't have to be a landed, white male anymore) and not so good (we've opened the political system to the Fox News-watching, government-hating American masses) and are now reaping what we sowed.

I explain all this by way of warning. If any of you Canadians are thinking of adopting any of the looney ideas espoused by us Americans — giving guns to the blind, privatizing the education system, banning poor people from voting, removing all environmental regulations — and are willing to bring Ottawa down unless you get your way, do all of us living in your country a favor: keep it to yourself, at least until Washington has gotten back on its feet.