Populist pretenders

Doug Ford and Donald Trump are both dangerous con men who will do more harm than good

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OPINION

The more conservative commentators try to emphasize the differences between Donald Trump and Doug Ford, the more Ford's actions point to the similarities. Yes, no two politicians are the same. There are differences. But at the core they are both dangerous, pretender populists.

Neither of them have a record of delivering for their core supporters.

After a year in office, it's hard to see how Trump is helping his base. He's giving them lots of emotional red meat. He says the wall will be built. He's still trying get his anti-Muslim immigration order approved by the courts.

His tax bill gives the uber-wealthy the same tax breaks as the poor and middle class. His tariff policies will do more harm than good for American workers. He has filled the "swamp" with more billionaires than any previous administration. And the much awaited improved health care system is in shambles.

When managing the biggest city in Canada, Mayor Rob Ford and his brother Doug ran one of the most dysfunctional and embarrassing governments in the city's history. Services to the disadvantaged were cut. Mass transit planning was disrupted and delayed. Their promise to "spend smarter and still deliver better customer service" never materialized.

Instead of "stopping the gravy train," their first operating budget was a record high for the city. It was supposed to cut three per cent. Instead it added nearly 450 new staff.

They both appeal to the economically disadvantaged, and those who feel they're being left behind.

The original Ford Nation was made up of low- to moderate-income supporters from the Toronto suburbs. Many struggled to make ends meet. They look to Doug Ford give them a bigger piece of the economic pie.

Ford promises to eliminate provincial income tax for minimum wage earners. However, this would mean $1,100 less per year than if the $15 an hour minimum wage was introduced as planned on January 1. Also, the province will lose $500 million in tax revenue.

Trump promises to bring jobs back to the U.S. by making trade agreements fairer for American industry. So far it's buoyed stock markets but done little for unemployed workers in the rust belt.

The Ford follower's feelings of financial insecurity are caused primarily by the growing income and wealth disparity, driven by big business and the economic "elites." But neither Ford nor Trump talks about fashioning a kinder, gentler capitalism.

Instead, they both promise to reduce corporate taxes. This makes sense in the U.S. where the rates were as high as 30 per cent. Ontario's corporate tax rate is 11.5 per cent — the lowest in Canada and very competitive internationally. So, why promise to lower it further by one per cent and lose $1.3 billion in tax revenues?

Both Trump and Ford promote the illusion they are "on our side." They are fighting for the taxpayer, the little guy. "Liberal fat cats and insiders are getting raises while real folks aren't."

Ford neglects to mention these are teachers, doctors, first responders and scientists.

They both know a large segment of the electorate is tired of being "talked down to" by the "elites" in government, the media, business and education. They say they're fighting to get government to respect their base and recognize their needs.

In reality, both Ford and Trump are themselves business elites who are masquerading as populists. They are feeding off this very real cultural resentment — fanning the flames of discontent for their own ends.

For Ford and Trump the truth and facts are secondary. According to the Washington Post, Trump has lied over 2,000 times since assuming office.

Ford lies about his accomplishments while a Toronto city counsellor. He says he can cut the provincial budget by $ 6 billion (4.5 per cent) and not eliminate any jobs. Independent economists estimate this would result in about 75.000 public servants being stripped from health care, education and social services.

Both will endorse almost any questionable party candidate if it means gaining another seat. Trump's support of accused child molester Roy Moore in Alabama is a classic example.

Ford approved the nomination of Tanya Granic Allen. She is the social conservative who helped Ford win the PC leadership. Allen is anti-gay, anti-abortion, anti- Muslim and a burka-basher.

Recently, under mounting pressure, Ford had to reluctantly rescind her nomination.

They also like to imply, or even state their opponents are criminals and should be investigated and even jailed. Trump maintained Hillary Clinton's handling of her emails was criminal. He encouraged his followers to shout at rallies "Lock her up. Lock her up."

Ford's campaign struck a low point recently when he connected his promised audit of Wynne's government to the four-month jail sentence given to Dalton McGuinty's former chief of staff.

He said, "There should be a few more Liberals joining David Livingston in jail."

They maintain governments are basically wasteful and tax is a four letter word. They rail against the press as "conveyers of fake news" and "vultures who want blood" as if the media is the enemy of democracy.

They talk about a past that didn't really exist and present themselves as strong, decisive businessmen who can get things done. They like firing people and both are confirmed bullies.

The choice is becoming clear. Here's what you get with Doug Ford:

• Less take-home-pay for the working poor

• Restricted access to abortion

• Dismantling of climate change initiatives

• 75,000 health care and education jobs lost.

• Disruption of current transit plans

• A rollback of the updated sex education curricula

• A premier who dealt hash to low level dealers.

I know. We're all tired of the 15 year Liberal rule. But Trump wasn't the answer for America and Ford isn't the answer for Ontario.

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Trump   Ford