

FRONT PORCH PERSPECTIVE: Now what?

By Stephen Somerville

Now that the Federal Election has taken place and the Liberals have a majority, what's in store for the Federal Conservative Party? Unlike after the 1993 election of Liberal Jean Chretien when the Progressive Conservatives were left with two seats nationally, the Federal Conservatives are in relatively good shape today, holding ninety-nine of the three hundred and thirty-eight seats in the House of Commons.

Since former Prime Minister Stephen Harper recently announced his intention to step aside as party leader, electing a new leader will be one of the tasks that will need to be accomplished.

I do hope that the party takes its time on this.

Alberta MP Rona Ambrose has been selected as the interim leader so we don't need to rush into this. I hope we pick a leader sometime in 2017 so that lots of potential leadership candidates come forward, including ? from my perspective ? someone from outside the House of Commons.

I am not talking about a Conservative premier (because there aren't many) making a run for the Leadership, but rather someone from the private sector with a strong resume.

In the coming days and weeks you will hear lots about prospective leadership candidates.

A couple of things will be guiding my decision-making process as to whom to support.

First, what personal accomplishments ? either in business, education, public policy or volunteering can this person point to?

Second, do I believe that this man or woman has the potential to connect with voters in the large urban areas like Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver where our party has been shut out recently?

Third, which part of the political spectrum does this candidate come from ? far right, centre or left/centre?

I do believe that we need someone who is a moderate and can put a friendlier face on the Conservative Party. And this point will become even more important if Mr. Trudeau follows through on his promise to forsake the ?first-past-the-post? electoral system in time for the next election.

Depending on the type of electoral system chosen, it will most likely mean that building coalitions between voting blocs will become very important for the Party Leader in the future. (More on this in my next column.)

And fourth, what are the three or four main policy goals of the prospective candidate?

Once a new leader is chosen, then the party can get on with the very hard work of strengthening itself; recruiting new party members, raising funds and developing policy alternatives for the next election.

Speaking of policy, I am also very interested to see how the Party develops policy alternatives going forward.

Much has been written about the paucity of new policy offerings from Tories during the campaign.

My hope is that all party members will have the opportunity for their say on policy going forward and that we have learned our lesson from this electoral setback and our recent provincial election losses.

I think the federal Conservatives should take a page from their Ontario cousins.

Back in the early 1990s the party developed a plan that was discussed and debated within the various riding associations, and then at regional policy workshops before final resolutions were adopted after rigorous debates at a provincial wide policy meeting. These final policy resolutions became part of the party's platform.

The Federal Conservative Party should adopt this approach.

Party volunteers were energized, as they had the opportunity to make and influence party policy. This certainly did not mean that they won everything that they wanted - as the Leader and his campaign team crafted a campaign strategy and theme out of the policy resolutions - but the grass roots were consulted, and listened to.

So, why is all this important to me here in Aurora in the late fall of 2015 as Mr. Trudeau's Liberals will be holding power with a good sized majority until October 2019?

It is important for the simple reason that a democracy best functions when you have opposition parties that are ready and able to potentially govern.

Knowing that the other guy can do the job is a great way to keep the incumbents on their toes.

This is especially important now, given the state and the challenges in our economy.

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