

BROCK'S BANTER: Not Scheer magic!

By Brock Weir

As a movie fan, it's a fairly safe bet that I like drama as much as the next guy.

That being said, however, even I have my limits.

This past Saturday I was so grateful to have a previous commitment as, in the end, it saved me from myself. As the day wore on, I had flashbacks to years past where I was compelled by some invisible force to spend entire days on the couch waiting for an outcome that that was all but certain.

One of the last such times was the NDP leadership convention which propelled Tom Mulcair to the top job. The same can be said for the leadership races that shot Justin Trudeau, Michael Ignatieff and Stephane Dion to the head of the Liberal table with varying degrees of success.

As interested in politics as I am, I was not quite tuned in at the time Stephen Harper was crowned in the race to the newly-minted Conservative party, so this would have been my first time glued to a deep Blue sea. Yet, there was that pesky commitment, so I had to keep in touch via Smartphone.

And, phew, that was a close call! Waiting for the results in real time must have been agony for Conservative conventioners and armchair politicians alike.

That is no reflection on the outcome of the race, but just the sheer wait for satisfaction. (Get it? I digress?)

Votes were cast in a tabulation system, so all the votes could be counted (and were), along with second, third, and fourth place votes, and the final numbers redistributed and crunched all within a minute or two of the last ballot being fed into the machine.

Yet, in a supreme feat of high drama, they kept each of the 13 candidates who held in for the bitter end of the race on the edge of their respective seats to an even more bitter end for all but one. And, in the end, there could only be one. And, of course, we know by now that Saskatchewan MP, and former Speaker of the House, is the one.

Mr. Scheer was ultimately tapped by party members ? well, by points allocated to each riding ? to fill the shoes of Mr. Harper, the size of which is yet to be decided by history.

?There is renewed hope for Canada starting today,? he said to party faithful after his surprise victory over runner-up Maxime Bernier.

In his speech, which was warmly received by the energetic crowd in Toronto, he said a Conservative government in 2019 would focus on policies that create both prosperity and opportunity, on drafting balanced budgets, ending corporate welfare, reining in spending, nixing any talk of a carbon tax and scrapping HST from home heating and electricity.

?You have made this a campaign of ideas,? he said. ?We know that Conservative solutions are the best response to the issues which we are confronted with. In the next months we will have to communicate those Conservative values to a greater number of Canadians. The next Conservative government will always be looking for new ways to make life more affordable by cutting your taxes, making it easier for the public sector to create jobs and we will end the Liberal policies that make it harder to start new businesses, make life more expensive for families and that punish hard work and success.

?There is a system that rewards hard work and success which benefits all Canadians. As Prime Minister, I will focus on results with Conservative policies that create prosperity and provide opportunity for every single Canadian.?

But, Mr. Scheer also said he believed the foundation of the Canadian democracy is to ?have a debate about any subject.?

?That is why I am so committed to defending free speech,? he said. ?I will withhold Federal grants from university that shut down debate and can't stand different points of view.?

?We all know what happens when Conservatives are divided,? he added near the end of his speech. ?We will not let that happen again. We win when we are united. Throughout this campaign, all of the leadership candidates?working independently grew this party to the biggest it has ever been in history. Now imagine what we will do when we're all working together.?

Keeping taxes in check and fostering a hospitable environment for business have always been Conservative staples and what Mr. Scheer offered in his acceptance speech was earnest yet hardly ground-breaking.

From my perspective, the bolder pledge is party unity.

As the race drew to a close, most leadership candidates pledged they ? and their supporters ? would work together, regardless of victor, under the ?Big Blue Tent.?

It is a nice sentiment, to be sure, but how long will this goodwill last?

Taxes, business, and ?freedom of speech? (although some might take issue with that phrase being used in this context) are issues that surely unite Conservatives, but there were many issues which rose to the top that can only serve to divide.

Take, for instance how the vote shook down in the riding of Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill. According to data released by the party following Saturday night's announcement, Mr. Scheer handily beat Mr. Bernier on the thirteenth ballot with 60.54 per cent of the vote.

The first ballot, however, told a wildly different story.

At the outset, Saskatchewan MP Brad Trost, who ran on a campaign of rather hardline social conservatism when it came to abortion and to choose and equal marriage, to pick but two examples, was the clear leader of the pack with 47.96 per cent of the vote, with Maxime Bernier and Andrew Scheer in second and third place with 14.3 per cent and 12.6 per cent respectively.

The gap in Newmarket-Aurora was slightly narrower with Bernier and Trost tied for top spot on the first ballot with 24.58 per cent apiece, with Scheer in fourth position, about 1.5 per cent behind Erin O'Toole. (On the final ballot, Scheer and Bernier split the vote 50-50)

Mr. Scheer, of course, has social conservative values as does Mr. Trost to the nth degree. The popularity of Mr. Trost's campaign in certain pockets of Canada, coupled with the divisive immigration policies of Kellie Leitch, which undeniably resonated in certain segments of our country, makes me think the new leader's biggest task will be fostering that unity and truly defining what ultimately defines the party in a post-Harper universe.

If it was truly a campaign of ideas, the powers that be now have a smorgasbord to choose from. And, yes, those Conservative ideas do need to be communicated to a greater number of Canadians, but just what will those Conservative ideas be? Pocketbook ideas only go so far.

They better decide soon and, if Saturday was anything to go by, the New Leader better not put these ideas through a tabulated ballot or we could be waiting for the results through 2020.

(Editor's Note: Brock's Banter will return in the June 15 edition of The Auroran)