

FRONT PORCH PERSPECTIVE: The Federal Election

By Stephen Somerville

Your humble scribe is getting off his front porch and coming to see you.

I'm not sure though if that should be considered a promise or a threat.

It is that special time of year again.

No, it is not only the beginning of a potential Blue Jays Pennant run.

It is much better than that.

The federal election is here!

That means it's time to be visited by your newfound political friends and their volunteers.

Stop with the groans already; I can hear you from in front of my computer.

There is nothing in a campaign that beats door-to-door canvassing. It is where the action is. It is that time when the candidates and their emissaries get to meet the jury, one door at a time. Canvassing provides feedback, information on issues, moods and voter priorities.

One can also gain a better understanding of the candidate by watching them deal with rejection, tough questions, voter anger or the occasional embarrassing situation.

I state my bias off the top.

I am a campaign volunteer with incumbent Conservative MP Lois Brown.

Ms. Brown is being challenged by Liberal candidate Kyle Peterson, the NDP's Yvonne Kelly, the Green Party's Vanessa Long and Jason Jenkins of the Libertarian Party.

And this will be a long campaign.

As has been said many times, actual campaigns are important; it doesn't matter where you sit in the polls once the writ is dropped but it is where you sit come election day that counts.

In the 2004 federal election, 51,435 people cast their vote in Newmarket-Aurora. This increased to 58,799 in the 2006 election but declined to 53,227 in the 2008 election. Voter turnout increased in 2011 to 58,421, which represented 64% of eligible voters.

Over this same period the Conservative vote in the riding went from 21,818 in 2004 to 22,371 in 2006 to 24,873 in 2011 to 31,600 in the last election.

The New Democrats received 5,111 votes in 2004, 5,639 in 2006, and 8,886 in the last election.

It is the Liberals where the majority of votes were lost. They received 21,129 votes in 2004, 27,176 in 2006, but then fell to 18,250 in 2008 and experienced a further drop to 13,908 votes in the last election. That is a decline of 4,342. In other words, the Liberal share of the vote fell from 34.29% in 2008 to 23.80% in 2011.

It will be interesting to see how many people actually vote this time. If the Liberals have any hope of regaining this seat, they will need three things; to regain past Liberal voters, to eat into 'soft' Conservative voters, and they need to attract a large majority of new voters. A tall order and not good news if you are traditionally a Liberal supporter.

On a related note, your scribe has posed the following question to others over the years ? 'when do the majority of people make their voting decision?' and invariably I get one of three answers.

First, that voting decisions are made in the last seven days of the election because people are unwilling to focus before this time.

Second, other seasoned campaigners say that a lot of people make their decision soon after the Leaders' debates. This will be interesting this time as the campaign is very long and there will be multiple debates.

Still others say it is in the last 24 hours of the campaign.

My own observation is, in a traditional campaign with one English language and one French language Leaders debate in the middle of the campaign ? that other than those who are traditional party supporters ? it is an even split between those people who make up their mind in the day or two after the Leaders' Debate, based on the media's perception of what happened, and those who decide on the last day of the campaign.

However, a wrench has been thrown into this thinking because this campaign is going to be 73 days long and the first English speaking Leaders debate already took place.

This most likely means that the Leaders debates, while important, will not be the deciding factor, but rather the air war of TV advertisements between the respective parties will be.

With the most recent polls showing a tight race between the Conservatives, Liberals and NDP, this should make for a fascinating

election.

I look forward to coming off the front porch to meet some of you!

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