

MAY 2018

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Musings About the Ontario General Election

Most polls are showing the PCs and the NDP running-neck-and neck at around 37% with the Liberals a distant third somewhere around 20%. Some pollsters suggest that the PC vote is more efficiently distributed across the province and foretells either a PC minority or possibly a majority government. But anything is possible at this point with less than 10 days to go until E-Day on June 7th.

Most Tories I know are unimpressed with Doug Ford but are prepared to hold their noses and vote PC. With no PC platform on sale, they rationalize it down to the superior qualities of the local riding PC candidate. However, there's also the narrative that some progressive PCs will abandon their party and vote for either the Libs or the NDP. There's also the possibility that the "Anybody but Ford" vote will coalesce around the NDP whose leader is performing very well on the campaign trail. These possibilities are what make the 2018 election so intriguing.

I'm also hearing that many who are not satisfied with any of the three major parties will turn to the Greens out of protest. Look for the Greens to win their highest ever vote count in the upcoming election because the leaders of the PCs and Libs are so highly unpopular. And speaking of the Greens, their leader Mike Schreiner stands a good chance of winning the Guelph seat which was previously held by prominent Liberal MPP Liz Sandles who is not seeking re-election.

And speaking of protest voting, if you truly want to register a protest vote in an Ontario election, you should go to your assigned voting station, register so your name is crossed off the voters list and then refuse the ballot; in this way your vote will officially be recognized and counted as a protest vote.

Traditionally the Liberals have owned Ontario's larger urban areas, the PC's have dominated the province's rural regions in southern and eastern Ontario and the NDP have been strong in pockets such as Niagara, Hamilton, Windsor and in Northern Ontario. The mould will likely be broken on June 7th.

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Elections always have surprises, incumbents in party strongholds who are believed to be “shoe-ins” who are tossed out. Which Liberal cabinet ministers will lose their seat to the NDP this time around? Will it be Bill Mauro or Michael Gravelle in Thunder Bay or Glenn Thibeault in Sudbury. Who among the seasoned Liberal veterans will be cast aside by the voters? Will it be Bob Chiarelli in Ottawa or Jim Bradley in St Catharines. Or what about Premier Wynne herself, will she prevail in her Toronto riding? There are sure to be some unpredicted upsets.

Sensing that he is not wildly popular, Doug Ford is now promoting his PC team and is appearing in roundtables with some of his stronger candidates to illustrate that his team has depth and is ready to take control of the reins at Queen’s Park. Ford took over a caucus of 27 members, many of them strong performers such as Vic Fidelli, Todd Smith, Steve Clark, John Yakabuski and others. Two, Ernie Hardeman and Jim Wilson have cabinet experience. The NDP had only about 18 and none with governing experience. Down-playing Ford could prove to be an effective strategy for the PCs.

Look for the PCs to win some of Toronto’s inner suburbs in Etobicoke, North York and Scarborough where “Stop the Gravy Train” Ford Nation populism runs strong. They will also win a number of seats in the 905 ridings that ring Toronto such as Mississauga, Brampton, Vaughan and Richmond Hill.

Last Sunday’s debate will have little effect on the election outcome. Ford was outclassed by both Horwath and Wynne who both have more expansive vocabularies, have cohesive and costed platforms to talk about, know the issues and can speak articulately about them. Ford’s vocabulary is more limited and he has trouble with the subject, verb object thing.

Ford’s polling numbers have declined almost since the day he was elected PC leader. His campaign, centred on the fact that he is not the unpopular Kathleen Wynne and which has not come forward with a comprehensive plan for governing, seemed smart initially but is starting to backfire as the election approaches. The absence of a comprehensive platform could turn out to be his greatest weakness.

It could boil down to a riding-by-riding ground game, which campaign is best equipped to turn out their own supporters. Will the pissed-off and disenchanted be motivated to turn out and demonstrate their discontent (are these the best leaders our political parties can find; what’s wrong with democracy in Ontario) or will they stay home in protest?

Your task, of course, as a construction industry leader, is to make sure that the issues of importance to the construction industry that fall under the purview of the provincial government get into the public discourse in your local community during the campaign. These issues include the following:

1. Continuing with the implementation of the new Construction Act created with the passing of Bill 142 as currently scheduled with the modernization of the

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Construction Lien Act amendments taking effect on July 1, 2018 and the payment regime and dispute resolution system coming into force on October 1, 2019. Too much has already been invested by everyone in the industry to let government to drag its feet on this priority.

2. A continued long-term commitment to investing in the renewal and expansion of Ontario's public infrastructure to support economic growth and our enviable quality of life
3. A commitment to addressing the skilled-trades shortage and modernizing our apprenticeship system to improve access for young people, to update training to ensure apprentices receive current relevant training on the most current practices and techniques, and to make it easier for employers to take on apprentices. We are facing a drastic shortage of skilled workers in construction that must be addressed.
4. A long-term plan to achieve fiscal balance and reduce the province's debt: GDP ratio to more sustainable levels

This can be done by promoting these issues in your associations publications, by writing op-ed pieces and letters to the editor for your local newspapers, by attending all candidates meetings and asking questions, by surveying the candidates in your local ridings on these issues and publishing the results. These are some of the tools I know you have been using during this election campaign.

These are just some the stream of consciousness ramblings from a non-partisan with no horse in the race that I thought I'd share. We'll all be tuned in for the results on June 7th.

COCA Committee Holds Information-Packed Meeting

We were able to pull together such an important agenda for the WSIB-OH&S Committee meeting on May 30th that we opened the meeting up to Directors and COOs. The meeting turned out to be even better than planned. Included on the Agenda were the following:

1. An update from Committee member Michael Zacks from the Office of the Employer Adviser on the implementation of the WSIB's rate framework that will be implemented on January 1, 2020 and includes a new classification system, prospective experience rating and a new rate setting process.
2. Discussions with senior executives from the WSIB regarding the redesign of the compensation agency's prevention program (Workwell, SCIP and Safety Groups) along a continuum from compliance to excellence
3. A presentation from Cindy Shiewek from Workplace Safety North (WSN) who made that the compelling case that health and safety management systems alone don't

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always produced improved outcomes and that workplace culture is an equally important factor. She spoke about the Culture Assessment and Audit Tool (CAAT) that has been developed and that can play a role in improving performance.

4. A discussion with Ontario's new Chief Prevention Officer Ron Kelusky and his two senior Directors Bill Roy and Jules Arnst-Grey that covered the waterfront of Prevention Office issues including the next Ontario Health and Safety System Integrated 5 Year Strategy

It was an information packed and thought-provoking meeting. If you missed it, you missed a good one.

Great Meetings Planned for COOs and Board

Don't miss the upcoming COO Committee and Board of Directors meetings scheduled for June 13th at Woodbine Racetrack. The COO meeting will start with a lunch at noon with business commencing at 12:30pm. The meeting will feature a presentation by labour and employment lawyer Keith Burkhardt of Sherrard-Kuzz LLP about HR issues for construction associations. The COO meeting will conclude at 2:45 pm sharp.

The Board of Directors meeting will commence at 3:00 pm and in addition to the usual board business will include a comprehensive update on the Ontario College of Trades from OCoT Registrar & CEO George Gritzotis and a presentation by Charles Bird and Melanie Paradis from Earnscliffe Strategies about the 2018 Ontario General Election, what happened. Members of the COO Committee who are not members of the Board of Directors are very welcome to stay for the BoD meeting.

The Board of Directors meeting will be followed by dinner in the Woodbine Club and a night of fantastic horse racing and wagering at one of North America's premier facilities. So don't miss it