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NEWS COLUMNISTS

Gord MacFarlane

Tue, April 17, 2007



Good time, bad time for an election

By **GORDON MACFARLANE**



FEEDBACK

Is cutting the PST 1% a good idea for Manitobans?

yes

no

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People who follow Canadian politics seem to think now might be an astute time for the Conservatives to force an election. Polls indicate a majority could be within reach and, along with the advantages of incumbency, the party is apparently awash in cash while their rivals are all but skint.

Though far from flawless, the performance of the Conservative government thus far has garnered cautious optimism in most circles. Portrayed by some on the left as Bush-loving, homo-hating Bible thumpers, some Canadians half-expected the Conservatives to make homosexuality, day care and immigration illegal.

Deliberately cast as a puppet like 'Mini me' to George Bush's 'Dr. Evil,' Harper has instead shown himself to be independent, competent and resolute. Sure Ralph Goodale, Danny Williams and Lorne Calvert want to beat him up but by and large it appears most Canadians see him as best choice for the job of prime minister.

A recent SES poll showed Harper blowing the doors off the others when Canadians were asked which leader would make the best PM; 42% chose Harper while a paltry 17% chose Dion and a piddly 16% liked the guy with the mustache. Gilles Duceppe tied "none of them" with 7% while Elizabeth May at 4% was edged out by "unsure," which polled 6%.

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It's not like Harper and his team have been untouchable -- they have shown vulnerability on several fronts -- but much as the Liberals before them they are benefiting from a weak opposition.

The Liberal party has yet to re-launch or renew itself in any significant way and thus far, to be blunt, Dion has been a dud as leader. The party seems to have an inward-looking and divided focus these days with numerous MPs having decided to abandon ship. Most recently Belinda Stronach caught a whiff of reality and decided to call an end to her lark.

With the NDP being quite possibly the only major(ish) party wherein the whole is somehow less than the sum of its parts, they work hard but matter not. Numerically insignificant whenever Duceppe plays nice, Jack Layton seems well on his way to McLaughlinhood and one suspects the party can only go down from here.

Duceppe of course is sick of irrelevance and wants to be king of Quebec. Unfortunately for him, Quebec isn't in the market these days and so he waits patiently, all the while dreaming of ways to ruin our country.

With some in the Liberal party questioning their choice of leader and some in the NDP questioning their existence, a calm, competent Harper can not help but stand out. As Dion spends his days herding cats and having tantrums, Harper leads a focused group of team players. While the NDP limp along holding puppet shows and searching for a reason to be, budgets pass and work is getting done.

Politics, while fascinating and entertaining to some, are a game many Canadians are weary of watching. Quebec just had an election, we here in Manitoba are expecting one and Saskatchewan apparently isn't far behind. With voter fatigue a real consideration, Harper might be wise to simply do the job he was elected to do. After all, the prime minister should do what is best for the country, not what is best for his party.

Wouldn't that be a nice change?

Letters to the editor should be sent to letters@wpgsun.com.

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