

Will they be out in the hustings by May?

The great American entertainer Will Rogers once said about politics that “We want the best man to win an election. Unfortunately, he never runs.”

A bit cynical, yes. But there is a grain of truth to the notion that many people who would make good leadership material simply aren't interested in getting into the nasty game of politics.

Which leaves us, of course, with the choices we have.

And, if one is to believe current public opinion polls – although you should never equate them with Moses descending Mount Sinai clutching the Ten Commandments – then the chances of Prime Minister Stephen Harper finally achieving a majority, after five years of minority rule, seem pretty darn good.

Or bad, depending upon your own political leanings.

In any event, a large weekend poll published in the Toronto Star – hardly a friend of either Harper in particular or Tories in general – suggests that Harper doesn't have too much to worry about should the opposition get together – which they likely will after the upcoming budget – and bring his government crashing down.

The Angus Reid survey of 6,000 Canadians – six times the normal number – found that the Tories are sitting at 39 percent support, well ahead of the Liberals' 26 per cent, and the NDP's 18 per cent.

The signs are good for the Tories across the country. In Newfoundland, for example, they seem to have recovered after being shut out last time by then premier Danny Williams, himself a Conservative, who campaigned hard against them. The Tories sit at 42, up an astounding 28 points above their 2008 vote, almost certainly enough for them to reclaim four or five seats in that province alone. That might not seem like such a big deal except for the fact that Harper only needs a dozen extra seats to gain a majority, and that would be a significant place to start building.

In Quebec, as you'd expect, the separatist Bloc Quebecois remains well ahead at 39 per cent, but the Tories and Liberals are virtually tied at 20 and 21 respectively, with the NDP lagging at 14. That would be enough, despite all the doom and gloom predictions, for the Tories to retain their 10 Quebec seats and perhaps add one or two more.

But the best news for the Tories – apart from the fact that the Tories inevitably do better in actual elections than they do in pre-election polls, while the Liberals do worse – is that Ontario seems ready to turn its collective back on the Liberals and the NDP and send a lot of Tory MPs to Ottawa.

Given the popularity of Toronto Mayor Rob Ford and his rather conservative approach, combined with the massive unpopularity of Liberal Premier Dalton McGuinty, the federal Tories are looking good at 43 per cent in this poll, a full 13 points ahead of the Liberals and 24 points ahead of the NDP. That adds up to a bucket load of extra seats in Ontario, particularly in the GTA area which has been a long-time stronghold for the federal Liberals.

In the West, where the Tories have been strong for decades, they are holding their own – which is all they need to do – while the Liberals have gained slightly and the NDP has fallen back, all of which suggests that Jack Layton may want to think long and hard before he joins the Liberals and the Bloc in bringing down the government and hoping to fight an election based on the Tory desire for corporate tax cuts.

Indeed, if that is THE issue in the election – the opposition says it will be, and Harper must be hoping so – that's even better news for the Tories.

People understand, even if Michael Ignatieff and Layton don't, that lower corporate taxes make our economy more competitive, which is to say they create jobs, while taxes tend to kill them – which means that the revenue you supposedly give up by lowering the tax a point or two tends to be more than made up by the creation of more jobs and all the good things that flow from that.

It's pretty easy to shoulder inane left-leaning slogans – “Make the rich pay” being the most popular – when the fact is that a) the rich do pay (the top 5 per cent of taxpayers pay 58.72 per cent of all federal individual income tax, while the bottom 50 pay only 2.7 per cent); and b) if you tax business out of business, there's nobody left to pay anything.

While Harper and the Tories continue to say they don't want an election and the opposition continues to threaten one, there is no doubt that Harper, in the privacy of his den, is hoping against hope that he'll be out in the hustings by May.



**National
Affairs**

**Claire
Hoy**

All the films I saw last year won big at awards

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a documented fact that he does not win this year). How right he was!

Needless to say, I was delighted that Colin Firth won his award and that the movie was named Best Picture. I was a little disappointed that Rush didn't win, and I think

we can forgive Melissa Leo for her choice of words during her acceptance speech.

There are estimates that more than one billion people watched Sunday's spectacle, which certainly does a lot to stress the interest in it all. A case in point was myself, who saw only of the nominated movies, yet was inter-

ested in what was going on. I guess even I was impressed with the glamour of the whole event. As well, there are uplifting moments, such as bringing out 94-year-old Kirk Douglas to make one of the presentations. There were also the sadder moments, such as when they went through the various no-

tables who have passed away over the year (I didn't know Robert Culp and Susanah York had died).

As award shows go, Sunday's offering was pretty good. It even ended earlier than most probably anticipated.

I'll bet Johnny Carson would have been impressed.

Protect farmers to protect farmland

Recently, there has been a great deal of attention paid to the challenges faced by rural communities in building prosperous, vigorous agricultural economies.

The costs of maintaining rural infrastructure (bridges, roads and culverts) coupled with legislative constraints placed on the farm community – under any number of provincial planning and conservation authority regulations – make creating a gainful, self-sustaining agricultural sector very difficult; particularly in near-urban communities like our own.

Just a couple of days ago, I was interviewed on The Current (CBC Radio) about the complexities rural communities face in meeting a demand for land to accommodate future population growth with the very basic need to preserve food producing, prime agricultural properties. In 2006, the provincial government introduced Places to Grow, a framework for how and where Ontario's future residents would live and work. While this 25-year plan is primarily directed toward urban development, it clearly impacts rural communities through policies designed to



**Mayor's
Report**

**By Marolyn
Morrison**

“curb sprawl and protect farmland and green spaces.”

While “farmland protection” is a noble and wholly supportable goal, the question has become whether or not Places to Grow and other provincial planning initiatives, such as the Greenbelt Plan, have had an unexpectedly negative impact on our farming industries.

Research into the impact of Ontario's growth and greenbelt plans is ongoing of course, but there is mounting evidence that suggests these policies have resulted in lower productivity, less profitability and poorer production on farms in the areas protected by these broad provincial regulations.

Again, while these laws may have been created in good faith, they likely would have benefitted from meaningful input and advice of

community and farm leaders from the rural communities they have affected. In response, I founded the Greater Toronto Countryside Mayors Alliance (GTCMA) in order to bring some clarity to the challenges predominantly agricultural communities are facing as a result of these provincial strategies. We have had considerable success and at the Rural Ontario Municipal Association/Ontario Good Roads Association combined conference this week, three Provincial Ministers (Municipal Affairs and Housing; Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs; and Infrastructure) will be meeting with my GTCMA colleagues and me to speak to the concerns of the GTA's near-urban communities – an opportunity to bring our views directly to the government's attention.

Time and time again, I

have been told by farmers in our community; “if you want to protect farmland, protect the farmers,” and I couldn't agree more. We need to re-think policies at the provincial and local levels so they are not barriers to our agricultural industry – we need to develop a legislative approach that delivers the flexibility and support farmers need to thrive in these challenging economic times. We need to encourage and, more importantly, enable agricultural innovation. We must seek ways to encourage opportunities for on-farm, value-added products and services. We have to adopt common sense practices that facilitate and promote the entrepreneurial traditions that have sustained our agricultural communities for generations.

If we are to create a thriving, prosperous agricultural economy in Caledon, or in any of Ontario's rural communities, we must listen and learn from our farmers. To ignore their experience and advice may leave us with nothing more than a barren agricultural wasteland. I believe we all want to benefit from a living, vibrant rural landscape.

Food and farming strategy being created for the Golden Horseshoe and Holland Marsh

A summit planned for early March to discuss a food and farming strategy for the Golden Horseshoe has been re-scheduled.

Organizers of the summit report that initial response to the first draft of the Agriculture and Food Strategy for the Golden Horseshoe released in mid-January has been positive, but given the magnitude of the project, some respondents thought the timeline was a bit too aggressive.

“We want to get this right (and) I believe the timing is right for a comprehensive agriculture and food strategy,” said Nick Ferri, chair of the Greater Toronto Area Agriculture Action Committee (GTA AAC), one of the partners of the project. “There is a provincial election this fall. What better time to present candidates with solutions

to health care and education, environmental problems and fluctuating farm income?”

Ferri observed that a number of other organizations have been working on similar projects. Sustain Ontario is working on The Ontario Food Act, the Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA) is working on an Ontario Food Strategy, the Canadian Agri-Food Policy Institute published a report last year, Toward an Integrated Health and Agri-food Strategy for Canada, and a new one just announced, Canada's Agri-Food Destination. Many other jurisdictions have already completed strategies.

The draft study document, Agriculture and Agri-Food Strategy and Action Plan for the Golden Horseshoe, will be the focus of the Food and Farming: An Action Plan

2021 workshop in Toronto next month. Stakeholders with an interest in sustaining a thriving agri-food cluster in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), Hamilton, Niagara and the Holland Marsh are all welcome to attend the event. Participants will be asked to comment on the draft study document and brainstorm the action plan to transform and invigorate agriculture and food processing in the study area.

“Let's boast about agriculture and the agri-food industry becoming the driving engine of the Ontario economy,” Ferri said.

Workshop keynote speaker Bob Seguin, executive director of the Guelph-based George Morris Centre, will address ideas for positioning agriculture in the Golden Horseshoe and Hol-

land Marsh as a key solution provider for Ontario's economic, environmental and social needs.

The draft study document was prepared by Planscape Inc. for the GTA AAC, together with the City of Hamilton, the Niagara Region and the Holland Marsh Growers' Association, and will be available for download at www.planscape.ca/agriculture.html or www.gtaa.ca

The workshop will be March 30 at Evergreen Brick Works, 550 Bayview Ave., Toronto. Seating is limited and advance registration is required. RSVP deadline is March 21 and should be made to the Region of Durham Planning Department at 1-800-372-1102, ext. 2551, or by e-mail at planning@durham.ca