



PAAC E-News

Public Affairs: Your Online Newsletter

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[President's message](#)

Political parties through a glass, brightly



by Elaine Flis
PAAC President

It has been wisely said that we don't see things as they are; we see things as we are. That was never more true than in the difference between the way many journalists and self-elected pundits report on political parties, and the way things truly are within one. This idea cropped up recently while I was brainstorming with a friend about politics, about the Liberal party as it stands on the cusp of an election, and about what we've read recently concerning its internal discussions.

Read a newspaper article claiming to reveal the 'inside scoop' about the Liberals leading up to and in the aftermath of the party's leadership contest, and you see a reflection of all that is cynical. These 'scoops' describe internal conflict like a Disney cartoon fight among dogs, with a whirlwind of flying fur and angry words jotted in the margins, like 'biff,' 'howl' and 'bash.' The writers who report things in this way see the party in terms of violence, self-interest and dysfunctionality, and that's sad.

When you're in a political party it's more like being part of an extended family. There are indeed vigorous debates and arguments which, like any family, you prefer to carry on in private rather than air publicly. Yet the very reasons behind the vigour of those debates lies in commitment and loyalty, and at the end of the day when arguments are resolved and the proper course is agreed upon, that commitment fills the same role in a party that

love does in a family.

The leadership convention? I suppose that was like the annual family Christmas party, where the mere fact of everyone being together generates hot discussions. Sometimes those voices are raised in festive good cheer; other times they are raised in genuine disagreement. Yet if somebody who peeks in a window from outside is the sort who hears only the raised voice and sees only the disagreement and does not understand the family commitment behind what they are seeing, it reflects on that person's own mind-set more than it does on the family itself.

I think it's too bad when the public gets a wrong idea of the political process from those who see it only from the outside looking in through the glass, darkly. Because I can tell you for sure, family arguments notwithstanding: It's warmer inside.

Ryerson fellowships coming

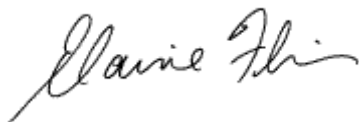
As the first step in creating an endowed chair of Public Affairs and Campaign Management at Ryerson University, PAAC has begun a fund raising program to create a Faculty Fellowship and two Graduate Fellowships in Public Affairs and Campaign Management. With luck and the generous support of corporate, association and individual donors, we look forward to seeing these fellowships established by the fall of 2008.

These fellowships will allow graduate students and faculty to expand research into the broad range of theoretical and practical aspects of Public Affairs and Campaign Management. Public policy, political institutions, the role of interest groups, organization behaviour, quantitative and qualitative research, management techniques and media training and analysis are among the areas for further research that will, ultimately, support the growth and development of public affairs in Canada.

Now, I'd like to welcome our newest members to the professional family of PAAC:

- Colin Doylend, Colin Doylend and Associates
- Jim Goetz, Fasken Martineau
- Linda Kenny, Canadian Parapalegic Association Ontario
- Paula Konstantinidis, Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario
- Kathleen Perchaluk, Seneca College
- Angela Bishop

Feel free to contact me with input and ideas.



Event report

Numbers keep falling on our heads

March 6th was the day of our PAAC breakfast session, *The Art and Science of Polling*, at The Suites hotel/condo complex at One King Street. That morning, downtown Toronto was a danger zone because the CN Tower was sloughing off huge sheets of ice, threatening to land like divine justice on everybody's bean. That's not all that was falling from the sky that day, either. There were a hell of a lot of numbers coming down. The air was thick with polls, many with jagged edges, what with an election then still brewing in Quebec, one on the way in Ontario, and a very fat maybe on the federal scene. Talking it up for about 60 PAAC members and guests that morning were **Derek Leebosh**, Senior Associate at Environics, **Christian Bourque**, VP at Leger Marketing, and **Don Guy**, President and CEO of Pollara. Said PAAC Director Guy Skipworth in his introduction: "Election fever is in the air."

Flash! Latest Angus Reid poll says Harper preferred as PM for 35%! Only 19% pick Dion! Over past month 29% say their opinion of Dion is worse - only 9% say better!



Derek Leebosh makes a point over breakfast.

"It's going to be a busy political year in Canada," agreed Derek Leebosh, who started

things off with a general preparatory talk about polling, lest we forget that for all its science it remains a look in a rear view mirror. Time was, election polling just meant Gallup polls - one before an election and another during - and although people were interested, they didn't go into hysterics over them. Nowadays, half the media types and all of the campaign back-roomers get the heebie jeebies if they have to go 24 hours without one. "It's like junkies climbing the walls for their next fix," he said. Sure enough, as if to underscore what Leebosh would say that morning, for weeks before and ever since, we've been on an email list for the very latest from the Angus Reid firm, on every possible topic. Reading between the lines, each poll notice seemed to have a breathless, hot-off-the-presses feel to it:

***Conservative attack ads didn't work! Perception of Liberal leader
Dion remain stable! New poll reveals it!***

There's a hunger for polls everywhere, but the news media in particular are anxious to put drama and flash and immediacy into their headlines, Leebosh said, and boy is he right. It's called a news peg - something new and todayish upon which to hang that story, even if the story consists mostly of a journalist's spin doctoring, what-iffing, or blue-skying. Consider all that pre-springtime media buzz about a Conservative Surge. Leebosh recalled a news story he had seen earlier about this alleged Conservative Surge, yet below that screamer headline in war-sized typeface, the story told the tale of a comparatively weak set of numbers - no embryonic majority in those digits at the time; they were no greater than what might reflect another minority sister-kiss if an election had broken out at that moment. Real majority numbers have only emerged recently. "Much of the analysis," Leebosh told us, "is very short-term."

No surprise there, of course. Except for a few shining lights, deep down the media are shallow - which is precisely why they work from the latest polls, however ephemeral. The meaty issue at election time is not how the parties look compared to yesterday or last month, Leebosh said, but how they're performing compared to the last election. That's where political changes live, and there was no sign back on March 6th of the rise in Harper's poll numbers that have materialized since. The major parties, Leebosh pointed out, are brands which customers buy out of habit. Liberal, NDP and Tory, he said, "are like Tide, Arctic Power and Oxydol." Which is why early comments by alleged pundits about how Stéphane Dion would do in a campaign did not impress him. "One year ago, some of those pundits were saying Stephen Harper was unelectable," Leebosh pointed out. The truth is now ineluctable, but nobody learned it from pollsters.

***Tories hold double digit lead in polls! On brink of majority! 40%
would choose Tories, only 26% Liberals! Tories retain 85 per cent
of Canadians who voted for them in 2006 while Grits hold on to
just 66% of their supporters! New poll says so!***

In fact, Leebosh added, media coverage generates its own effect on polling. The Liberal leadership convention received saturation coverage because the Grits are seen as the Natural Governing Party, therefore newsies watched the proceedings the way they watch for that puff of white smoke from the Vatican at re-Poping time. When the puff came and

Dion was anointed, "there was a post-convention bounce that had to dissipate" before anyone could get down to looking at the new leader with unblinking eye.

Spotters of trends? Be wary, said Leebosh, reminding us how Ernie Eves scored very high in all the pollsters' indices of leadership attributes, right up until Dalton McGuinty smacked him and his Ontario Tories into 2015. Other notes of caution: "I'm prepared to eat crow if I'm wrong," Leebosh said, but media talk of the rise of the Green Party is hype. The politiscape does not now include four viable parties, he said. "What we've got here are three political parties and an idea." People like the idea of the Greens because their one issue happens to be hot these days. Voters read something about it in the *Toronto Star*, or they saw Al Gore's movie. But that's not the same as seats in the House.



Christian Bourque guided us through the Quebec scene.

With those caveats in mind, Christian Bourque of Leger told us what his polling had to say about Quebec - all of it in advance of the potentially number-changing March 13th leaders' debate and subsequent election. It's interesting to compare his analysis with actual events. Although Quebecers, he said, were tending toward a higher satisfaction with their Liberal government, suggesting stability, "Charest is respected by the media, but not liked," he said. As for leader Mario Dumont of Action Démocratique du Québec (ADQ), "Dumont is liked but not as respected." André Boisclair of the Parti Québécois (PQ), he said, somehow was managing to be neither liked nor respected, which meant that to the Quebec media Boisclair would be snack food without the cellophane wrapper. Maybe with the public too - the PQ dropped 20 points between the time he was named leader and the day Bourque spoke on March 6.

Nearly two thirds 62% of Canadians say Justin Trudeau makes no

difference whether they would vote Liberal! In Quebec 58 % say they would not vote for him if he ran in their riding! Latest polling!

Bourque predicted Charest would be good on offense, a searing debater and crafty campaigner. But with the media disliking him, Bourque said to watch for the use of unflattering photos against him. Boisclair he described as young, smart but inexperienced, not seen as decisive, and it wasn't going to help him that he snorted coke while in Cabinet. Dumont? "He's a real populist," said Bourque. "A master of the 15-second TV clip." He labeled Dumont as likeable, but unfortunately, seen as "the rural guy," which would hurt him in Montreal. Charest was called the leader in competence and statesmanship. Dumont lead in honesty, and was predicted to benefit from a right-shift taking place in Quebec. Boisclair polled last in leadership attributes. So the day Christian Bourque gazed into his crystal ball for us, things looked like no huge upset in terms of which party would form the government in Quebec, but he predicted a Liberal minority. And that's the way it turned out. Sovereignty, he said at the time, was in a dormant phase for now - and sure enough, the PQ got thumped down, and all the after-the-fact experts said it's because Quebecers are fed up with separatist talk. (Although, like Dr. Frankenstein's creature, separatism can walk the land once again at any time - all it takes is for something from the Rest Of Canada to spark the bolts in its neck, irritate Quebecers, and the beast will rise amid sputtering lighting and crashing thunder.)



Don Guy took the spotlight re Ontario, federal scenes.

But back to March 6th. With polling caveats and the Quebec scene covered, it was time for Don Guy to take the spotlight. Guy is especially interesting because he wears more than one hat. For a while he was at arm's length from Pollara while he was Dalton

McGuinty's Chief of Staff. Now he's back at Pollara, but still in charge of McGuinty's re-election campaign. All this bodes well for him knowing plenty, whether or not he tells all he knows. One thing he had to say that resonated with other pollsters: There is a level of volatility among the voting public that hasn't been seen since the 1970s, and he said it's impossible to separate impressions of federal vs. provincial parties in the public mind.

Health care is still a top issue, but his polling also confirms that the environment managed to rise to the very top of mind in very short order. Given the play it's getting in movies, television, and on the world stage, that's not surprising. "Everybody at the federal level is scrambling over what to do," Guy said. And anyone who tries to push other issues to the top is fighting the public mind, whether that politician's jurisdiction happens to include the climate of Planet Earth or not. Here in Ontario, for example, most people think it's up to the federal government to save the world because it's their jurisdiction, but that all governments should be doing something about it anyway, simply because it's so important. That same public is not quite sure what should be done, and might become grumpy when 'something' turns out to be a carbon tax that will make them colder or poorer or both, but nevermind that. Polls clearly show that the public is fully convinced of what's important by media coverage and movies like *The Day After Tomorrow*, so the average Man In The Street is certain we have to do something fast before the whole planet freezes over from global warming. Our leaders see no choice but to follow.

***Poll shows 31% say Dion cares more about environment while
66% want domestic action on climate change! But fuel hike
unpopular!***

According to Guy's data, 47 per cent of Ontario voters are looking for change from government on minor issues. A significantly lesser 38 per cent would like to see a major change in course. Only 10 per cent would like to see no change. As for what kind of changes: People want change in health, education, and the environment; after that interest tails off on things like transportation and even taxes - a far cry from the days when people wanted to tear out McGuinty's throat over tax hikes that came about four-fifths of a second after he swore they wouldn't.

To elicit thoughtful responses rather than emotional ones, when he's wearing his Pollara hat Don Guy does not phrase questions in terms of, *how would you vote?* or *does this person or party deserve re-election?* Instead he asks, *what would you like to see?* In Ontario as of the day he spoke to PAAC, 43 per cent were saying they would like to see the Liberals remain, while 41 per cent said they would like to see someone new. Those numbers couldn't make Guy comfortable under his McGuinty campaign hat, but they're better than that 2004 post-budget mob coming down the street brandishing firebrands and pitchforks. As a pollster, he remains skeptical when he hears others say John Tory is more popular than Dalton McGuinty, because he believes Pollara gets more telling answers from his more carefully phrased 'what would you like to see' questions. One thing he does admit, though: "The Conservative brand has been revived by Stephen Harper," although he added that federal Tories are much more popular than Tory's Tories.

Yet all this confusion between the federal and provincial scenes must be getting on Guy's nerves, given his pollster's preference for clear answers, and his campaigner's wish to get a message out. Even though Quebec is in the bag, Ontario still has to vote, and, there are too many competing federal and provincial numbers flying around for polling to generate clear predictions. Getting a federal election out of the way before October would bode well for the ability to articulate a clear message provincially, he mused. Otherwise it's going to be a variation of the ancient Chinese curse: Comes the fall, we will surely be living in interesting times. Especially for pollsters.

-D.S.

Flash! Conrad Black unpopular! Polls show 59% of Canadians would not feel sorry if he's convicted! Latest public opinion numbers!

[The Book Man](#)

The 'dismal science' goes undercover



Book Review by Stewart Kiff

The Undercover Economist: Exposing Why the Rich Are Rich, The Poor Are Poor - And Why You Can Never Buy A Decent Used Car!

By Tim Harford

With his latest book, *The Undercover Economist*, British journalist Tim Harford has followed in the footsteps of Steven D. Levitt's and Stephen J. Dubner's successful *Freakanomics* in making the dismal science both a trendy and interesting subject outside its normal audience. Some of you may be familiar with Harford's Dear Economist column in the *Financial Times Magazine*. Those who aren't will find this book a worthy introduction to his witty and erudite style.

The one drawback, at least for the North American market, is that all the examples used in the book are British, but this is easily overcome by the author's enthusiasm and the everyday context he uses. In fact, of all the books you read this year, *The Undercover Economist* probably has the most practical advice you can apply to your daily life. Harford deconstructs the upscale coffee shops that seem to fill every main intersection in Canada's downtown city cores. He even delves into the economics behind the Starbucks pricing scheme and in practical terms shows how you as a consumer can actually optimize the value you receive at this and other up-market coffee chains.

As Harford breathlessly shares with his readers, for all intents and purposes, every serving essentially costs the same for Starbucks to produce. The cost differentials between the various types of drinks and cup sizes amount to mere pennies. The prices vary because the consumer will pay these amounts, and in fact some Starbucks customers show remarkable price indifference. It is for these consumers that the elaborate coffees such as *chai latte* have been created. For those who are price sensitive, there remain fairly inexpensive items on the Starbucks menu.

Continuing on the coffee theme, Harford even examines the growing phenomenon of fair trade coffee - that is, coffee produced with a social conscience, under agreements that ensure the farmers are not exploited. He notes that, while its provenance may be exceptional, in terms of utility for the drinker, it is indistinguishable from non-fair trade coffee. And he talks about the example of what happened when a company actually tried to charge more for fair trade coffee when it was served alongside the non-fair trade type.

From a political perspective, you will not get much new out of this book. Thematically, it is much more like a return to Economics 101 - including the unquestioning endorsement of free trade and the removal of all tariff barriers between countries. So politically at least, it is a little daft. For sheer entertainment value however, it really can't be beat.

Those who find this book interesting may be provoked to read Harford's first book *The Market for Aid*, which he co-authored with World Bank VP and International Finance Corporation Chief Economist, Michael Klein.

Strongly recommended.

PAAC member Stewart Kiff is the President of Solstice Public Affairs. He welcomes your feedback and suggestions, and can be reached at stewart@solsticecanada.ca.

Of word spats, brats and educrats

by David Silburt

PAAC Web Editor

The melee between protesting students and police outside Birchmount Park Collegiate in Scarborough last month was funny by some standards, and not by others. You may have seen it on the news, but may not have paid much attention because protests from various aggrieved people are so common in this nation of whiners. Yet the event was a window on the culture of entitlement taught in public schools, and it connects to public affairs because students represent the New Public - future voters, politicians, campaigners and setters of the public agenda. Look at them.

According to published reports, students at Birchmount set up a web presence on the Internet at a site called Facebook, in order to disparage their vice-principal. Toronto District School Board officials ordered the offensive comments removed, and suspended the students responsible because they deliberately violated Board rules against such defamation - rules of which the students are perfectly aware. The students then staged a protest against the suspensions, complaining their freedom of speech had been violated. When not many students turned out to participate, some enterprising soul pulled a fire alarm, emptying the school into the street, where students blocked traffic and demanded attention in the manner of spoiled kids. But that's not the funny part yet.

Nor was it funny to hear the dear kidlets reveal their self-centered view of the world, as when a boy described police trying to clear the roadway: "Everyone was on the road and then things started flying and the cops started flipping out." Childish language is par for the public education course even through high school, unfortunately, and that also includes this whining excuse for arrogant Internet utterings, from the ringleader of the children: "It's just us talking." Nothing funny there; parents hear whiny talk all the time when they catch children with their hands in other cookie jars. No, the funny part was when school officials acted surprised that students would behave according to feelings educators have been teaching them, without realizing it, for the children's entire lives.

Modern educrats have taught a generation of students to feel a massive sense of entitlement, and every high school student is a product of this. Students are taught to feel prideful, and to base their pride on things like race, religion, their culture if they have one, or their sexual preference whether they have settled upon one or not - all the things people have by accident of birth, genetics or upbringing. Pride derived from accomplishment is not in fashion, apparently because singling people out for their creativity seems somehow to discriminate against those unable to achieve at similar levels. Accomplishment may still be recognized, but it won't earn kids the kind of pride they are encouraged to arrogate based on what they happen to be by the purest accident. Students are taught that, simply by being here, they have a right to prominence, and to air opinions based on nothing substantial. That's the basis of the popularity of

Internet phenomena like Facebook or YouTube or MySpace.

A child's education begins with hollow pride, then proceeds to arrogant entitlement because any callow youngster taught to feel proud of himself for no reason maintains a self-centered view of the world, where freedom means being free of both responsibility and consequence. That's how we get a boy who shrugs off his derogatory Internet comments about the school vice principal, saying, "It's freedom of speech." That's also how we get children who feel free to swing a skateboard at police, something which was done at the Birchmount protest. Four students at the protest were charged with things like assaulting peace officers, assault with a weapon, obstructing police and creating a disturbance, but it boils down to ill-mannered children who are full of themselves.

Where did they learn this? In school. Educrats began to demolish what they considered to be an outdated, 50s-style, Ward Cleaver education mentality long before any of these teen fools were so much as a lascivious spark in their father's eye, and they have laboured at it since. Now, after decades of their efforts, the evidence seems to be that schools usher children methodically from infancy to brathood, unless parents oppose the process at home with a massive dedication for which only comparatively few can muster the energy. We all know some parents who have succeeded at this tough job, but the kids at that staged protest were not theirs. Children who argue their right to spout off as 'freedom of speech' and defend it by swinging their toys at police are examples of the school experience overcoming parental attempts, if any, to offer a better example at home.

To see modern educrats wring their hands about this - *that* is the funny part, at least by some mean-spirited standards. Anyone who has no children, and whose sisters and brothers and friends have none to care about, or those who are wealthy enough to pay for private schools with a different approach, can afford to call it funny.

For everyone else it's not funny at all. It's tragic.

Have your say

We welcome member input, whether it's a letter to the editor, a story suggestion or a proposal for a guest column. Feel free to email your input or suggestions to us. All submissions for publication on this site are subject to approval by the Editorial Board.

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