

Editorial ? Elliott clearly safest pick for PCs

With Patrick Brown no longer seeking to regain the leadership of Ontario's Progressive Conservative party, there should be no doubt as to which of the remaining four candidates is best suited for the job.

In our view, Christine Elliott is that person.

While it's true that the widow of former federal Finance minister Jim Flaherty was unsuccessful in two previous bids for the leadership, we think the party would have been in far better shape had she won either time.

After all, there's little doubt that she wouldn't have made the faux pas committed by Tim Hudak in talking of trimming the public service by 100,000 jobs, and there's surely no doubt that she wouldn't have faced the allegations of misconduct that led to Brown's downfall.

As we see it, the June 7 election is clearly the Tories' to lose, and they'll lose only if the freshly elected party leader makes a major miscue.

This is going to be an election in which the governing Liberals will be perceived by all but the party's bedrock faithful as having grown old and tired, more recently having shifted to the left in hopes of making things tougher for the New Democrats.

In the circumstances, there would be no point for the Tories to paint themselves as neoconservatives determined to reverse all the policies of the current administration, including the \$14 minimum wage (although the move to \$15 may be put off for a year or more).

And while there's no doubt that the costliest decisions of the Liberals over the last 15 years have been due to the politicization of the province's electricity system, it's one area where there are no viable solutions that will bring monthly power bills down without increasing the government's debt load.

Accordingly, the best plan for the Tories would see the emphasis placed on the need for fresh faces and a fresh start rather than on policies that would signal a sharp move to the right on the political spectrum.

Obviously, in such circumstances the best PC party leader would be someone with actual, recent experience in the legislature.

Of the four candidates left following Brown's withdrawal, none actually has a seat in the legislature and only Elliott is a former MPP, having served two terms before being appointed Ontario's first patient ombudsman by then Health Minister Eric Hoskins.

The only other candidate with actual political experience is Doug Ford, a former Toronto city councillor who ran unsuccessfully against John Tory for the city's mayoralty in 2014.

Of the other two, Caroline Mulroney obviously has politics in her blood as the daughter of former prime minister Brian Mulroney, and Tanya Allen has been a long-term PC member and the party's outspoken critic of abortion and the province's sex education curriculum. As we see it, both should win seats in the legislature as keys to any cabinet posts in the new government.

At 62, Elliott probably sees herself retiring after a couple of terms in office, when she will have turned 70, and by then Mulroney will still be in her 40s and likely a strong candidate for the top job.

At present, it's anyone's guess as to the June election's outcome. But if recent polls showing the Tories' support at about 50 per cent are accurate, there's a real possibility we shall see a PC sweep of the sort not seen since those by Mike Harris in 1995, when his Common Sense Revolution won 82 of the legislature's 130 seats, and by Bill Davis in 1971 when the Tories won 78 of the 117 seats after being in office without interruption since 1943.

And if the Liberals and NDP share the non-Conservative vote fairly evenly, we might even see something approaching the result in 1955, when the Tories, after 12 years in office and Leslie Frost seeking his second term as premier, garnered 84 of the 98 seats at stake.

It could happen!