

Editorial ? A year for one or two elections

There's no doubt at all that this new year of 2014 will bring with it a chance for all Ontario residents to cast ballots.

Under Ontario law, municipal elections will take place in all cities, towns, villages and townships Oct. 27, and those elected to municipal councils and school boards will serve four-year terms, the next elections being in October 2018.

Ontario law also calls for terms of no more than four years for provincial politicians. Since the last provincial election was in 2011, that means an election would normally take place in October 2015.

However, since the 2011 election produced a minority Liberal government, an election could take place at any point in the "normal" four years, and there's widespread speculation that we'll be going to the polls this spring, roughly 18 months before the fourth anniversary.

Of course, that's far from a certainty, and the speculation is based on an assumption that Premier Kathleen Wynne's "new" government will be defeated because its 2014 budget is expected to call for new taxes to finance roughly \$2 billion annually needed to finance the Big Move, Metrolinx's plan to battle gridlock by building new public transit facilities for the Greater Toronto and Hamilton areas.

At present, there's no doubt whatsoever that the budget measure will be opposed by the official Progressive Conservative opposition, with leader Tim Hudak contending that the \$2 billion can be raised annually without any tax increases by somehow finding it in "gravy" or inefficiencies and at the same time eliminating the current annual budgetary deficits of roughly \$10 billion.

However, it's not so likely that the budget will be actively opposed by the New Democrats, if only because the Liberals would raise part of the \$2 billion from corporate taxes, the source recommended by NDP leader Andrea Horwath.

One thing not yet made clear is whether the Liberals' scheme would see all Ontarians face higher taxes on vehicular fuels or only those residents deemed to benefit from the Big Move.

Our suspicion is that unless polling shows a massive move in public opinion, none of the three parties at Queen's Park would benefit much from an early vote.

Currently, the Liberals and Conservatives each have the support of roughly one in three voters and the NDP one in four, and even if the Tories won enough seats to form a minority government they would not likely survive long against two parties with remarkably similar policies.

That being the case, none of the three party leaders is likely to see much benefit from an early election, and it will look increasingly likely that the status quo will be maintained until October 2015.

If that's the case, 2014 will see only elections at the municipal level, when Ontarians will elect about 2,800 council members and 700 school trustees.

New for 2014 are changes to voter identification requirements. This time, all voters will be required to show identification in order to vote. If your name is on the voters' list, you will be required to show one piece of identification that has your name and address on it in order to receive a ballot. (The requirement to show identification that has your signature on it has been removed.)

In all likelihood, all Ontarians will be at least passingly interested in the Toronto elections, where controversial Mayor Rob Ford vows to seek another term in office.