

Editorial ? Let's hope for a much closer result

The current riding of Dufferin-Caledon contains within it one of the most unusual federal constituencies in Canadian history. The riding of Cardwell was unique in containing parts of Simcoe (later Dufferin) and Peel counties, and was apparently created to guarantee a seat for the Conservatives, come what may.

Cardwell existed from 1867 to 1904, and always sent a Conservative to Ottawa, usually by a large margin. The riding consisted of Adjala, Mono, Albion (including Bolton) and Caledon.

Since then, constituency boundaries have changed many times but one constant has remained. The only time this area sent a non-Conservative to Ottawa was when there were two conservative parties, the Progressive Conservatives and Reform/Canadian Alliance.

Today, David Tilson is seeking his fifth straight term as Conservative MP for Dufferin-Caledon. There may well be benefits to be derived from living in one of the "safest" Conservative ridings east of Alberta, but if there are, we haven't observed them.

Provincially, one consequence was the downloading of major provincial highways on local taxpayers, leaving Dufferin and Caledon ratepayers paying far more property taxes per dollar of assessment than residents of any part of Toronto.

Federally, Dufferin-Caledon has never experienced any investment in such things as federally owned office buildings or even a federal park like Toronto's Rouge Valley park. And even in the longest federal election campaign since 1874, this part of Canada hasn't been visited by Stephen Harper, Justin Trudeau or Thomas Mulcair, all three seeing the local outcome as inevitably a fifth term for Tilson.

In the circumstances, it would be foolhardy for us to depart from a long tradition of not endorsing a party in a federal or provincial election, preferring instead simply to report on newsworthy events and give all the candidates an opportunity to explain to our readers why they were running and deserved their support.

This time around, Dufferin-Caledon voters will be able to choose from among four good candidates, and no one knows what portion of the local electorate will cast ballots primarily for a party or for its local candidate.

However, if recent national polling has been accurate, the D-C Liberals should do a lot better than they did in 2011, when they wound up in fourth spot behind the Green and NDP with about 13 per cent of the votes cast, down from 39 per cent in 2004, when Tilson edged out former MP Murray Calder.

With the national polls last weekend showing Justin Trudeau's Liberals more than six percentage points ahead of the Conservatives and roughly double the paltry 18.9 per cent of the popular vote the party received nationally with leader Michael Ignatieff in 2011, Ed Crewson is likely hoping for a second-place finish this time.

Of course, much will depend on whether any significant number of D-C voters opt to vote "strategically," seeing little difference between the stances in the Liberal, Green and NDP platforms and perhaps finding Trudeau more likeable than Ignatieff and his predecessor as Liberal leader, Stéphane Dion.

With the advance polling now history and the election now just four days away, the one thing that seems certain is that none of the three main parties will win a majority of House of Commons seats. That being the case, there would seem to be a likelihood that if the Conservatives wind up winning a few more seats than the Liberals and NDP, Harper will opt to continue in office and present a Speech from the Throne that would be attractive to the other parties.

However, if recent statements by Trudeau and Mulcair are to be believed, the two leaders are prepared to work together to end the Tory tenure in Ottawa, and the only question remaining will be whether they will opt to form a coalition government or have the party with the most seats try to govern by agreeing in advance to adopt some measures demanded by the runners-up.

We'll just have to wait and see.