

Editorial ? Lots to think about, as federal election nears

Beleaguered Minister Julian Fantino has been removed from his Veterans' Affairs portfolio; Prime Minister Stephen Harper actually had a sit-down session with Premier Kathleen Wynne and we eagerly expected lots of goodies announced in the coming months from Ottawa.

Yes, we would hazard a guess that there's a federal election in the offing.

The law, which Harper put through, states there has to be an election this fall, since the last general canvass at the federal level was in 2011.

It is a fairly safe bet that Harper is hopeful that Canadians will give him another majority government to lead, while the opposition parties are equally hopeful that's not going to happen. And the fact is it's too early to make bold predictions on what's going to be running through voters' minds in the month to come.

It is true that the economy has done rather well over the last couple of years. Harper may or may not be responsible for that, although from what we know of politicians, he's likely to take as many bows as he can.

But is the economy going to be doing as well some months from now? The price people pay to put gas in their cars has been dropping lately. To many of us, this is good news, but there's always a downside to just about any story. We're hearing more and more rumblings that these low prices are going to be serious bad news for the economy of Alberta. And we would guess that Alberta plays a big role in any plans and hopes Harper has.

The value of the Canadian dollar has been dropping with gas prices at the pumps. That may or may not be a bad thing, depending on the financial realities closest to you. But it could well be an election issue.

There are other matters that are likely to be on the minds of Canadians as the year progresses.

The recent acts of terrorism have not directly impacted Canada, but one never knows. And as we learned with the shootings on Parliament Hill just a couple of months ago, things can change very quickly. Whether the person responsible for this incident was a terrorist is debatable, but Canada could find itself just as vulnerable as France if terrorists looking this way mean business.

People might soon be more fearful for their personal security, and that could be an issue come election time.

Lots of other issues could come into play.

There are some people who might not have confidence in their government. There has been talk of people who fear the government might be getting too aggressive and invasive when it comes to individual liberty and privacy. There are probably some Canadians who miss the penny.

There have also been suggestions that Harper might not wait until the fall, but call the election early, taking advantage of his current popularity, rather than wait until October, when things might have changed. Assuming he tries such a move, it will be interesting to see how the voters react, especially since Harper has always been a proponent of fixed election dates. How much of that issue might he be forced to eat? And how prepared would the opposition parties be to serve it to him?

And the national political dynamics come into play this time around.

True, Harper won a majority in 2011. But he was up against an ineffectual Liberal leader in the person of Michael Ignatieff and an inspirational NDP leader in the person of the late Jack Layton. Neither leader is going to be around to contest things in 2015, which means Harper could well be looking at an entirely different scenario.