

## Editorial ? Outcome still anyone's to guess

Perhaps the one lesson learned from this overly long federal election campaign is that it proved prognosticators can be wrong. Back in early August, when the election writ was dropped, most of the pundits saw the early call as greatly benefiting the ruling Conservatives, and surely no one doubts that was why it happened.

The main reason cited was that the Conservatives had a huge war chest and would be able to use it against the main opposition parties, the New Democrats and Liberals.

Thus far, the money has gone into a series of attack ads that began well before the election call and were designed to establish that once again the Liberals had picked the wrong leader, a contention easily established with both Stephane Dion and Michael Ignatieff. The message this time around was that Justin Trudeau was 'just not ready' to become prime minister.

No doubt the ad campaign was devised well before the election campaign started, at a time when opinion polls placed the Liberals slightly ahead of the NDP. Whatever the case, it now appears to have succeeded mainly in turning the public's attention to the Liberal leader to see how well he performs and how long it took for him to make a major gaffe.

And perhaps the most surprising result of the campaign was the Liberals' decision to use the attack ads against the Tories and Prime Minister Stephen Harper personally, suggesting that it was Harper himself who sees Trudeau as not ready to occupy the Prime Minister's Office (PMO).

The most recent polling seems to show the Liberals as slightly in front and the NDP to be sinking close to the party's traditional support level prior to the 2011 Orange Wave in Quebec.

However, our suspicion is that a large portion of the polls' respondents who favoured the Trudeau option were really not committed to a party and might not turn up to vote Oct. 19.

In that case, a lot will depend on such things as the weather polling day and any late developments in the campaigning.

One thing we don't see as having much impact is this week's announcement of the successful conclusion of negotiations leading to a Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) trade agreement.

The subject of secret talks carried on for a number of years, the trade pact is being trumpeted by the Conservatives as great for Canada and Canadians but also as something that will require billions of dollars in government assistance to Canadian agriculture and our auto industry.

Without being able to see it, NDP Leader Tom Mulcair has served notice that an NDP government would not ratify the pact in its present form, while Trudeau has taken a middle course of saying that while he favours free trade he would need to look at details of the agreement before deciding whether it is a net benefit to Canada and the proposed aid to the farm and auto industries is appropriate and adequate.

In the circumstances, we suspect that most voters will take a similar wait-and-see approach and base their decision on which party to support on something else - hopefully on something more significant than the appropriate wearing apparel at citizenship hearings. One disappointing feature of the election campaign has been the apparent limits placed on Conservative candidates by either the party or the PMO.

Locally, Conservative incumbent David Tilson has shown unusual courage in joining with the other Dufferin-Caledon candidates in deploring the length of the campaign, but apart from that has clung closely to the themes advanced by his leader.

That the Tilson camp has lots of money coming in is shown by the huge number of large blue signs on our highways and byways. But when it comes to lawn signs in neighbourhoods there are an unusual number of red ones in Shelburne and Bolton.

Now, with the election just 11 days away and advance polls commencing this weekend, the only thing we can predict with any confidence is that no party will emerge with a majority of Commons seats, and even that confidence is not unlimited.

And if that is the case, the Ottawa scene will be a lot more interesting than would otherwise be the case, post-election.