

Editorial ? Progressive Conservatives? ?chaos? a blessing in disguise?

The shocking, unexpected departure of Patrick Brown as leader of Ontario's Official Opposition party, the Progressive Conservatives, may well turn out to be a blessing in disguise.

Although in its immediate aftermath the party seemed to be in chaos, with the resignations or ouster of some top PC officials, the party does have an interim leader with all the needed credentials (including some Brown lacked) in Nipissing MPP Vic Fedeli, who until Tuesday seemed to be the one likely to lead the party into the provincial election in June.

As we see it, much will depend on both the timing and the method employed when the party goes about choosing a permanent leader.

Ideally, the leadership convention should be no later than mid-March, and the party should adopt procedures similar to those employed historically rather than the ones used when Brown upset the highly favoured Christine Elliott, widow of former federal finance minister Jim Flaherty.

Historically, party leaders were chosen at conventions by delegates selected by local riding associations ? a simple process that would fit neatly in a two-month-long timetable.

In 2015, Brown won the leadership by having his campaign team sign up thousands of ?instant? party members, the result being that even today a substantial portion of the reported 20,000 PC members likely have had no long-term affiliation with the party.

Fedeli, 61, obviously has a lot of support in the party caucus, his election as interim leader having been unanimous and without the usual prohibition against seeking the permanent leadership.

His remarks following his election Friday suggest that he had long been considering the position the party should take, but Tuesday he said he won't be a candidate for permanent leader.

He stressed Friday the need for swift action.

?I am prepared to lead this Party moving forward. We need to focus immediately on Kathleen Wynne and the Liberals. There's no time to waste,? he said.

?The days, weeks, and months ahead will not be easy. But, I'm confident that as a team we can, and will, bring the change Ontario needs, change that renews Ontario's status as the best place in Canada to live, work and raise a family.?

No one knows how many candidates will seek to become the odds-on favourite to replace Kathleen Wynn. But one for sure is Doug Ford, brother of the late Rob Ford.

As we see it, the March convention should select both a leader and a platform for the June election. If that happens and Ford emerges as winner, there's little doubt that we'll see some similarities to the last U.S. presidential election.

Ford said Monday he was running because ?I can't watch the party I love fall into the hands of the elites,? adding: ?The elites have shut the door on the grassroots, the foundation of our party. Our party cannot go without a tested leader in this crucial time. If we lose this election, I don't know how the average people in Ontario will recover.?

The former Toronto city councillor and mayoralty candidate said he would give a voice to people who have been ignored and are ?suffocating? under ?high taxes and big government.?

In view of the fact the Liberals have been in power for 14 years and are back in office at Ottawa, the Tories will be heavy favourites to win a substantial majority of seats. However, a lot will depend on how far right-of-centre both the party and its leaders are seen to be.

It would certainly be both interesting and unprecedented if the winner turned out to be Christine Elliott or Caroline Mulroney, daughter of former prime minister Brian Mulroney, and all three major parties in Ontario had women at the helm.