

Editorial ? Read something into byelections, but not too much

There were two provincial byelections held recently, although they may have been overshadowed by the Olympic Games in Sochi. The Progressive Conservatives held on to Thornhill, while the New Democrats took Niagara Falls away from the governing Liberals.

The fact that Premier Kathleen Wynne's Grits got blanked should be something of a concern to her, and Tory leader Tim Hudak and NDP boss Andrea Horwath do have a certain right to rejoice. But the fact is there's a big difference between a couple of byelections and the real thing, namely a general election.

For one thing, the voter turnout figures are certainly nothing to rejoice about. According to unofficial figures from Elections Ontario, only 37.6 percent of those eligible to vote in Niagara Falls actually did, and the numbers were worse in Thornhill, with just 27.3 per cent getting to the polls. That means more than 70 per cent didn't bother.

For that reason alone, we would caution against anyone trying to read too much into these figures.

Besides, we're more than two years into a mandate, and the governing party often takes a beating in byelections held at a time like that.

But it could also be a sign of things to come. The Liberals have been running things at Queen's Park for going on 11 years, and there is a certain dissatisfaction that's been expressed by some voters. The interesting thing is such feelings have been expressed since the Grits took power. May we remind everyone that Dalton McGuinty campaigned in 2003 on a promise not to raise taxes, then put that pledge in the bucket with his first budget, when he treated us to the Health Car Premium. Yet he won another majority a couple of years later and his party is still in charge.

Wynne has been leading the Liberals for a little more than a year now, and seems to have found some favour, although it remains to be seen if that will translate into votes when it comes time for the next election, and many expect that might come before we celebrate another Canada Day.

This means opportunity could be knocking for Hudak and Horwath, but it will be up to them to make the best of it. No matter how angry some people might say they are at the Liberals, McGuinty demonstrated just how much the voters are sometimes prepared to let leaders get away with.