Endorsements: do they work?

EDITORIAL

UNLIKE THE TORONTO PAPERS, this community newspaper has never endorsed a political party or candidate, feeling it's our job to inform the electorate and leave it to voters to decide who deserves their support on election day..

However, when so many other journals have had a habit of supporting one or another party, it's appropriate that we should ask whether such endorsements really work.

In our view, much depends on the extent to which any publication avoids distorting its news coverage of an election campaign in favour of the party it plans to endorse. An example of this can be seen in the Toronto Sun, which never sees a Liberal government or leader that it doesn't like and almost daily demonstrates that in its news pages. That used to be the case with the Liberal-leaning Toronto Star, although in recent years its editorial board seems to have been leaning toward supporting the NDP.

Of all the Toronto dailies, perhaps The Globe and Mail has come closest to what we see as an ideal, with news coverage that doesn't seem biased and recent editorials that tend to be critical of all parties.

One example of what should be done in terms of news coverage was the Globe's coverage of an announcement Monday by Conservative leader Andrew Scheer promising that his party would provide major tax relief beyond its commitment to abolish the federal carbon tax imposed on provinces that fail to take similar action against climate change. He pledged that if the Tories form the next government they would cut taxes for every working Canadian by implementing a Universal Tax Cut of up to $800 per family; assist commuters with a Green Public Transit Tax Credit worth up to $1,000 a year, and support young families by making Employment Insurance maternity and parental benefits tax-free.

Appropriately, the Globe's coverage of the announcement Tuesday included the fact the Parliamentary Budget Office estimates the promised income tax cuts alone would cost the government more than $6 billion a year once fully implemented.

That disclosure may have led some readers to wonder how Mr. Scheer would avoid increasing the already-large federal deficits without cutting services.

In the present circumstances, it will be interesting to see which way the Globe's editorial board will lean, and whether there will be a repeat of its strange stance in 2015 when it called simultaneously for the re-election of the Conservatives and that party's ouster of Stephen Harper as its leader.

It will be just as interesting to see whether there will be a repeat of the inappropriate move by Paul Godfrey, then Chief Executive Officer of Postmedia, when he ordered all the chain's newspapers to publish editorials sent them which called for the Conservatives' re-election. That wasn't a problem for former Sun Media papers like the Toronto Sun but must have seemed passing strange for readers of once fiercely pro-Liberal papers like the Ottawa Citizen and Winnipeg Free Press.

As a result, nearly all of Canada's dailies called for a Conservative victory, yet voters opted for the Justin Trudeau-led Liberals. We'll never know whether the endorsements were ignored or were effective in electing 99 Conservative MPs.

Whatever the case, we applaud the CTV television network's commitment to do regular fact-checking of both leaders' campaign promises and social media postings in this era when ?fake news? has become such a problem and so many cities and towns have lost their newspapers.

The challenge facing all newspapers these days is to manage to cover elections with news staffs that are tiny compared to those before much of their advertising revenue disappeared thanks to a love affair between major retail chains and the flyer industry and

the later advent of tax-free online advertising.

Part of that challenge will be the need to make fact checks against claims by the local politicians and their parties, in hopes that come election day we shall have an electorate that is really informed about the issues and the consequences in helping elect a particular party.