

National Affairs by Claire Hoy ? A lousy week for democracy

Oh my. Here we are at Christmas time, when everybody talks about peace and joy and all that stuff, and wondering how last week became such a lousy week for democracy both in Ontario and Alberta.

First, Alberta, where the Tories enjoy the longest ongoing political dynasty in Canadian history, more than 43 years and counting. You likely know that nine members of the official opposition Wildrose Party, including party leader Danielle Smith, crossed the floor to join the ruling Tories, leaving just five Wildrose MLAs in the Legislature and giving Tory Premier Jim Prentice 72 of the 87 seats.

Just two years after 440,000 Albertans voted Wildrose, this shameless gang of opportunists gave those voters the finger and slinked across the floor to the government side.

Sadly, one of the architects of this anti-democratic sell-out was Preston Manning, the founder of the old Reform Party and a man who used to be worthy of great respect in this space. There was a time when principle, not pragmatism, guided Manning. No more. Not long ago, for example, he wrote an op-ed column in The Globe and Mail saying the best way to bring in a carbon tax is ? wait for it? ? to avoid calling it a ?tax.? In other words, rule by subterfuge. Pity.

I have always believed that if politicians want to cross the floor, fine. But they should first resign and then offer themselves in a by-election so that the voters ? whose votes they otherwise have cavalierly discounted ? have the opportunity to either endorse their new status or kick them out.

People vote for many different reasons, but undoubtedly one of the strongest motivators is the party, whether or not you agree or disagree with the specific platform.

So if say you voted Wildrose instead of Conservative, Liberal or NDP, and your candidate won, you have every right to expect your candidate will pursue the platform the party offers. And if that candidate decides to switch, then you are entitled to a do-over. Period. Now, Ontario.

You may also know that the OPP declared last week that the Ontario Liberal caucus ? of which current premier Kathleen Wynne was a prominent member, lest we conveniently forget ? paid a senior aide to Dalton McGuinty \$10,000 to wipe computer hard drives in the premier's office to hide emails about the politically motivated decision prior to the 2011 election to cancel two gas plants.

Wynne has always claimed complete innocence of any knowledge and/or involvement in this decision ? even though she was a senior minister at the time and vice-chair of the party's election campaign team ? yet when the opposition parties tried to force a Queen's Park committee to investigate the scandal she ordered the majority Liberals to shut down any investigation. Nice.

Then there is the sorry spectacle in Sudbury, where just a few months ago the people gave NDP candidate Joe Cimino a slight victory over Liberal Andrew Olivier. Just months into his term, Cimino resigned ?for family reasons,? setting up a by-election to fill the seat. Fine, so far.

Olivier, a wheelchair-bound man paralyzed in a 1994 hockey game, lost for the Liberals by 982 votes last year and had planned to seek the nomination again.

But then Wynne dispatched some Queen's Park Liberal heavyweights to dissuade him ? he says they offered him a job not to seek the nomination (an accusation both the provincial Tories and NDP have asked election officials to investigate because, if true, it's a criminal offence).

Then, shortly after they booted Olivier to the curb, came news that Sudbury NDP MP Glenn Thibeault had suddenly resigned from the Ottawa caucus and, magically, had been lured by Wynne to run for the Liberals in the provincial byelection, creating the need for a federal byelection as well as a provincial one.

Talk about shameless. Wow!

Again, the 22,684 Sudbury voters who opted for the NDP federally have been robbed of their votes by a man who put his personal ambition ahead of his duty to his electorate. He knew that as a New Democrat in Ottawa he'd never rise above his MPP status. But you can bet that he's been quietly offered a cabinet post for switching parties and running for the Liberals.

In what is perhaps the lamest political excuse ever offered, Wynne flew to Sudbury last week ? where the entire Liberal riding association is about to resign ? and said ?electoral urgency? gave her no choice but to bring the former NDP MP in as the party's candidate.

What urgency, pray tell. She already has a strong majority at Queen's Park and can do pretty well as she wishes.

But there you have it, the Grinch who stole Christmas from Sudbury voters.

For the rest of you, however, I wish you a Merry Christmas.

