

Leadership debate as entertaining as circus

The recent leadership debate of the freshly-minted Canadian Alliance party held in Oakville was as jauntily entertaining as a circus.

Emotions ran the gamut. Happy were the young supporters who bounced about waving blue cloths whenever their favourite candidate spoke.

And sad were the Joe Clark people. They skulked about the entrance waving signs proclaiming Joe as their man and being shunned by everyone else.

But such are the vagaries of politics. One day you're in charge of the country. The next there are more occupied seats at a hemorrhoid convention.

When the five candidates took to the stage, they did so like rock stars. One almost expected moderator Tony Clement to holler "Ladies and Gentlemen... the Rolling Stones!"

So for those who couldn't make it, here's the low down.

First, in order of appearance, was Tom Long, for whom the gift of gab may be still in a box somewhere. But for a fiscal Conservative (and they were all that -- the 17 per cent flat tax and such) he loosened up on the social front.

He evinced, for starters, no urgent desire to march into Ottawa and launch an abortion referendum. Or, at least, not unless a whole lot of people say pretty-please.

Next up was the unknown John Stachow, the horse so dark he's all but invisible, with a one tone platform opposing the 1913 Bank Act.

Pleasing news for Dr. Keith Martin, who won't come in last now.

The doctor is an intelligent and compassionate candidate, as eager as a puppy dog on the podium.

Good if you're looking for a new home. Bad if the home you're looking for is the one the prime minister occupies.

Still, if he hoped to stand out from the crowd, Dr. Martin managed to by being the only pro-choice contestant.

Next was Preston Manning, whose name is usually linked these days with the phrase 'Can't Win In Ontario'.

Despite that, Mr. Manning appeared relaxed, far funnier than you'd think, and more prime ministerial than the rest by a prairie mile.

In terms of policy, his first is to run the Liberals out of Dodge. Another is to check



Gentle persuasion

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the public pulse on, yes, the abortion issue. Stockwell Day also seemed to pine for

an answer to that subject

An articulate son of a gun, he revealed a social conservative bent strong enough to either delight or scare the bejeezus-out of you. Just depends on your nature, I guess.

Since the party philosophy is spread by all, the top spot looks like a crap shoot. But if they promise to run the country as smoothly as the debate, this may be the party of choice in the next election.

Just don't tell the Joe Clark folk. They've suffered enough already.

Have your say. Fax letters to 878-4943.

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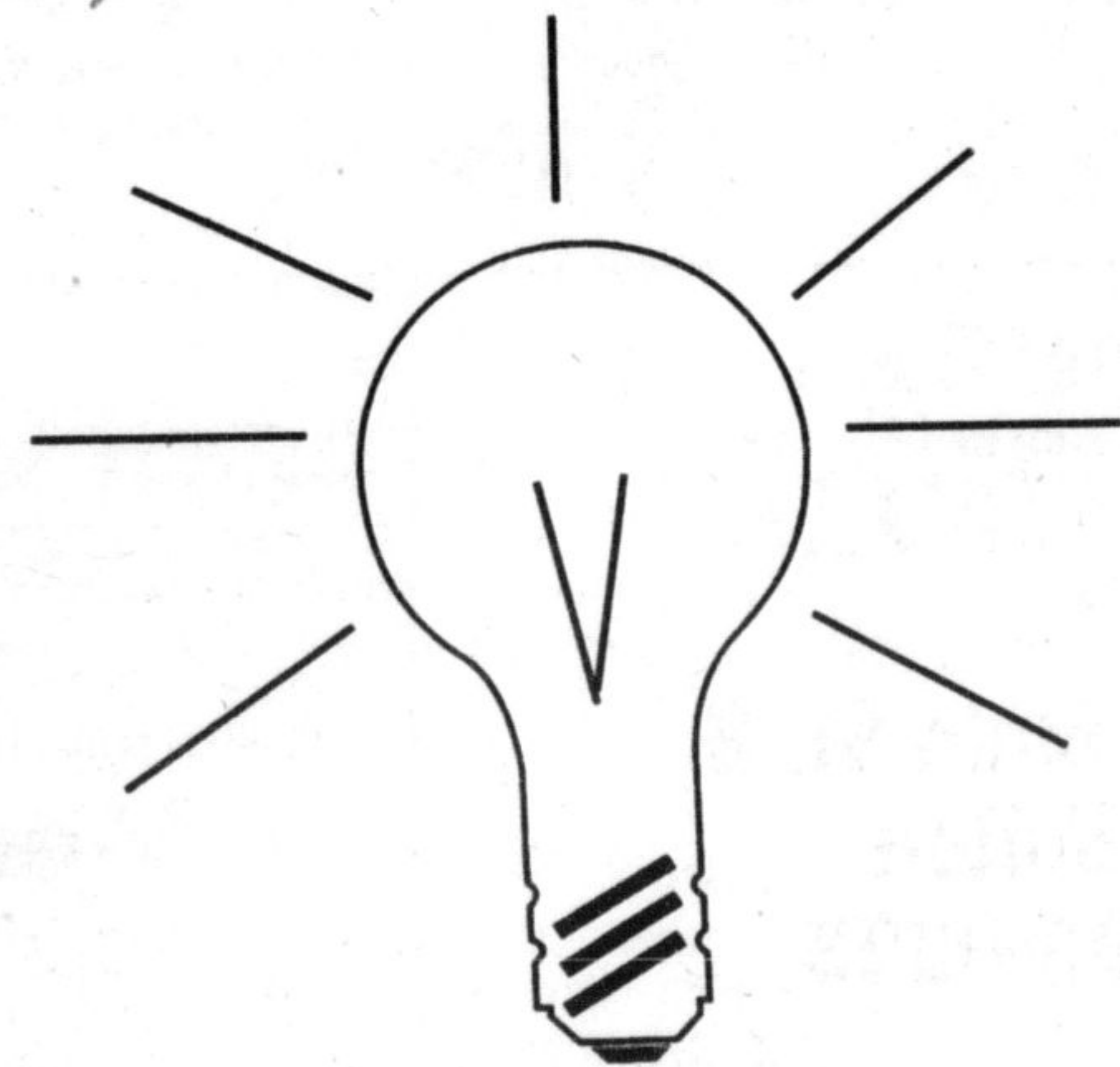
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