

The Empire Club Presents



ONTARIO POST ELECTION POLITICAL LANDSCAPE: A DEEP DIVE WITH KEY CAMPAIGN STRATEGISTS

**Welcome Address, by Barbara Jesson, President of Jesson +
Company Communications Inc. and President of the Empire
Club of Canada**

June 18, 2018

Good evening, fellow Directors, Past Presidents, members and guests. Welcome to the 114th season of the Empire Club of Canada, and, welcome, to the Albany Club.

My name is Barbara Jesson. I am the President of the Empire Club of Canada and your host for this evening's event, a discussion on "The Ontario Post Election Political Landscape."

I have some mixed feelings in saying that I am in the final hours of my presidency. Tomorrow will be our final lunch, and this is our final evening event. I would like to take a moment just to thank the Evening Events Committee, chaired by Megan Boyle. She is not with us. She has come down with the flu, but I know Tim Smitheman is here. I am so grateful for how actively you have pursued these evening events. I want to thank the Committee very sincerely.

I also would like to take the occasion to introduce to you the incoming President of the Empire Club for the 2018/2019 season. He is with us somewhere in the back. I saw him: Kent Emerson. Welcome, Kent. I hope that you have the benefit of enjoying your year as much as I have enjoyed mine. It has been a wonderful, wonderful experience.

Before we get started, I would like to draw for our door prize, which is a bottle of Ripasso Bosan, sponsored by Cesari Fine Wines of Verona. It is Fardous Hosseiny. Have I got that right? Fardous Hosseiny.

Given voter volatility in elections and voting around the world in recent, yes, years, our guests tonight clearly have nerves of steel. How else to explain anyone putting their careers on the line for a campaign? The polls just do not seem to be giving campaigns the data they need to develop key strategies, but something obviously went right this time.

How is it that polls have become so volatile? Explanations from sampling error percentage, inadequacies of survey modes, timing, field procedures. Polls do not predict; they measure the moment, waiting and determining probable voters all playing

into the kinds of disparity we see so often, today. Then, of course, we have also observed some very nefarious dealings in the use of big data. The rise of populism is an emotional response that has also stymied strategists as it emerges on both the left and the right, defying logic and, let us face it, quite often the facts.

Then there is the staggering mistrust of mainstream media in some sectors and the bewildering faith in citizen journalism wherever it appears on the Internet.

How do we understand the dynamics of the recent election here, in Ontario, and what can we look for in the months ahead? Here to help us sort through all of this is our panel of experts.

Omar Khan is Vice President, Public Affairs, Hill+Knowlton. He is VP of Engagement for the 2018 Ontario Liberal Party, and he served on the Central Campaign Steering Committee. Omar has spent over a decade working at the highest levels of the Ontario government as well as for federal and provincial election campaigns.

Michael Diamond is a campaign strategist and political commentator. He has worked on over 20 political campaigns in five provinces. A specialist in grassroots engagement, Michael has helped leverage the power of stakeholders for well-known clients in Canada, the United States and Australia.

Brian Topp is a partner at KTG Public Affairs. He recently completed a two-year stint as Chief of Staff to Alberta Premier, Rachel Notley, who has been a guest at our podium on two occasions. He previously served as Deputy Chief of

Staff to Saskatchewan Premier, Roy Romanow.

David Coletto is CEO and a founding partner of Abacus Data, a full-service market research firm based in Ottawa. With over 12 years of experience in the industry, David advises some of Canada's leading corporations and associations.

Our moderator, Tom Clark, is Chairman at Global Public Affairs. He has had more than 45 years of experience at the most senior levels of Canadian journalism. Tom left Global News in January of 2017, after serving as the network's Chief Political Correspondent and Host of The West Block. He has interviewed every Canadian Prime Minister since Lester B. Pearson and has covered every federal election campaign since 1974.

I would like to invite David Coletto to the podium to lead things off with a brief presentation, and then we will have our panel discussion.

Omar Khan, Michael Diamond, Brian Topp and David Coletto with Moderator Tom Clark

DC: Thank you, Barbara, and thank you everyone. Good evening. It is a real pleasure to be here. I will say, for those of you who do not know me or have not seen a picture of me before, I am old enough to vote in Ontario. I just credit my Italian heritage and all the olive oil for this youthful glow. Thank you.

This is the third Ontario election that I had the plea-

sure—I am not sure if it is always ‘the pleasure’—of trying to understand and look at what Ontario voters are thinking, how they are thinking and why they are thinking. As Barbara mentioned, polling has come under the microscope far too often these days, but I can say, happily, this was a good election for my colleagues in the industry.

What I am going to do today is very briefly go over what I saw in this election from a public opinion perspective. Then, I will hand it off to the panel to dissect it and explain why I am completely wrong with everything I have said.

Let us start with five data points that I think nicely sums up the election that we saw. Let us start with the horserace. If we go to the end of April, we saw what many people really thought was going to be a pretty easy victory for the Progressive Conservatives and Doug Ford. He entered the election well ahead. The Liberals were in second. The New Democrats, not too far behind in third place. You can see, as we all know, by the end, it got a little bit dicey, a little bit competitive, but, in the end, the Tories slightly outperformed the polls, got just over 40% of the vote. The NDP ended at 34%, and the Liberals were in third with seven seats and lost their official party status. That is the story.

What was this election about? Obviously, it was about change. This is a trendline from the start of the election to the end, showing the percentage of Ontarians

who wanted change when we asked them in our surveys; it goes from 80% at the beginning to 84% at the end. One of the marked areas of continuity over this campaign was the level of certainty or what we term determination of Ontarians to change their government. That did not change over the course of the campaign. The campaign did matter. Even though Mr. Ford ended off very similar to where he started the campaign in terms of popular vote, we did see some change, one of those being his own personal numbers. We saw a rise in Mr. Ford's negatives, going from 35% at the beginning to 48% at the end.

Ms. Horwath also had a good campaign. She did not win, but she started the campaign—despite this being her third campaign—with almost one out of five Ontarians saying “I do not know anything about her; I do not know who she is.” At the end, with more than a 2:1 margin, people liked her than disliked her. Despite not winning this election, she ended off far more popular, personally, than Mr. Ford did overall.

This momentum that we saw for the New Democrats in mid-way point of the campaign was also reflected when you asked voters, “Who do you think is going to win?” At the beginning of the campaign, most people thought—or at least those who had a sense of what was going to happen—and felt confident that the Tories were going to win the election. And you can see by a week before the vote, it was pretty much a dead heat with

equal numbers saying Conservative, NDP or, “I have no idea what is going to happen.”

For us, one of the interesting measures we continued to track over the campaign was voters' answers to the question of how they would respond to different outcomes. We asked people, for example How would you feel if the Liberals and Kathleen Wynne won? You can see there, at the end of the campaign, 52% of Ontarians said they would be dismayed if she would win. There is a reflection of this desire for change.

On the flipside, despite the sort of rising discussion about whether we should be scared of an NDP government or not, you can see that only one out of three—31%—were actually dismayed with the idea of a New Democrat government. There was not a lot of fear about the New Democrats.

The other thing that is going to surprise many of you, depending on what your political persuasion is, is that I think the reason the Tories held off the sort of orange tide that was building was that, despite more people fearing a PC win than an NDP win, not enough people feared a Doug Ford victory. As a result, they were able to push back any final attempts at strategic voting and perhaps Kathleen Wynne's attempt at trying to get some local candidates elected may have helped. I will let the panelists talk about that in the moment.

This is a change election. PCs held and mobilized their support, clearly, throughout this campaign, and NDP

momentum stalled, but I think they executed a good campaign.

Then, let us talk a little bit about what happened. What we did is, earlier last week, we went back into the field, and we asked people who voted why they voted, when they made up their minds, what the key issues were and, perhaps, more important to the future, what they want this new government to do. Let me share some of those results for you.

The first thing is when we asked people to give us a word to describe how you feel about the election, and there is a lot of words I had to remove, but, by and large, and again, this theme will come up, this word cloud is not as negative as you might expect it to be, given some of the media coverage of this election. There is a, yes a large disappointed group, but there is no great fear; there is no great angst about Doug Ford and the Progressive Conservatives. In fact, you see large words, and the larger the word, the more often—you see ‘hope’, ‘happy’, ‘great’, ‘good’. When you ask people How do you respond to this election? you can see 56% are either happy or are accepting of this result. That, again, might surprise many people. Only 17% say they are angry or upset with the result.

When we look at the map—this is hard to see for all of you—what is clear is that this election win by the Tories was geographically broad from one end of the province to the other, a large blue belt across the more rural parts of

the province, except up in the north. You can look here in the Greater Toronto Area, and see there is lots of blue. They won in cities; they won in suburban communities; and they won in rural parts of the province. They also did fairly well among every age group.

One of the things that we were talking a lot about at Abacus was the millennial vote. Would it show up? Would it have an impact on the result? At the end of the day, turn out went up, but, perhaps, not enough to give the New Democrats a boost. You can see that the Conservative win was pretty much lifted by the fact they did so well among older men, and the flip was true for the New Democrats, who won by over 11 points among women under the age of 45. These two demographic cohorts were critical to both of their parties’ ultimate success. The fact that older people were more likely to vote helped, I think, to push the Conservative numbers forward.

Similarly, around homeownership, this was an election where on the periphery, people were talking about affordability. Housing affordability was the top issue for a lot of voters across the province. You can see, among owners, the Tories won by over double digits. Among renters, the same thing for the New Democrats, so the difference between those who own and those who rent is increasingly becoming—as we are seeing, for example, in British Columbia and other provinces—a key driver in voting behaviour.

Perhaps most fascinating, to me, was us pollsters and social scientists asking about party identification: Which party do you identify with? not Who you are going to vote for? You can see, among those who identify as Conservative, almost all of them voted PC. Almost all of those who identified as New Democrat, voted New Democrat. But look among those who identify as Liberal. Half of them did not vote for the Liberal Party. When I come back to the end—and I am going to give Omar a little bit of hope for the future—this is still more a Liberal province than it is a New Democrat province. There are shades of the federal election after 2015.

When did voters make up their minds? One of the key things that perhaps was under-reported throughout the campaign was that two-thirds of PC voters had made up their minds well before this election started and were not going to change their minds. They had almost 30% of this election baked in from day one. You can see how successful the New Democrats did among that group, those who made up their minds in the last few weeks of the campaign. In the last few days, the Liberals actually got a little boost. Was that the Hail Mary passed from the premier, at the time? We will see. You can see that the Tories did not have to do much, except hold their vote throughout this campaign. Get them out on election day, and they could probably have won this election.

Another thing I want to address, and I only have a

few minutes, so I cannot go deep here—if I had hours, I would. Was this a populist uprising? Was this Trump 2.0? Has Ontario gone the way of the United States? I look at the data, and my answer is I do not think so. Here is why. If you look at one of the key drivers of understanding populist movements, education is increasingly becoming a key wedge in how people vote.

In the Ontario election, as many of those who had a university degree voted Conservative as those who had only a high school or college degree. This was not an election that was clearly divided on how much money you make or on what your level of education is. We can write that demographic trend off. When you look at feelings about anxiety around economics, PC voters were actually more likely to say they were financially secure than those who voted NDP. This was not, again, a lot of voters who somehow felt the system was letting them down or they were being left behind by a system moving forward.

One of the measures that those who try to measure populous movements look at is the question of Do you feel you have less power, that you are losing power in society? PC voters were just as likely to say no to that question as New Democrat voters.

There are some important differences. We asked people, for example, is political correctness out of control? That blue line representing Progressive Conservative voters shows that 72% of them say yes, but so did

54% of those who voted Liberal and NDP. Fifty-seven percent of Progressive Conservatives say Canada's diversity is making Canada something they no longer recognize, but so does almost a third of those who did not vote PC.

All of this tells me that we did not see this new coalition of populism rear its head in this election. What you had was those who had always voted Conservative coming out, and an additional five or six points coming who, at the end of the day, quite frankly, wanted a tax cut, and they wanted to kick the premier out. That, I think, is what was going on here. This, I do not believe—and the data still needs to be analyzed a little bit more—was, as some of my colleagues suggest, an uprising of populism in this province. It simply was the calculus of the PC-based voting with a suburban and urban older, wealthier population looking for change and, again, a little bit more affordability in their day-to-day lives.

Let me wrap up with then, how does the premier, then, and the new premier-designate, deliver for the people? When you ask people, again, open-ended, what they want, what the most important thing they would want coming from this government, you can see what they want. It is pretty clear. There are gas prices in there, housing, hydro rates, debt, deficit, jobs. Basically, you can see the Tory agenda in this word cloud. If you ask people what they are most worried about from this government, you see almost the same things. You see

the framing that I think, effectively, the opposition party did, which was focused on that people are concerned about healthcare. If I go back here, healthcare does also show up—where is it? It is somewhere on here; I saw it—on something that people think the new government will be able to help with.

In terms of higher debt, there was a stream of consciousness in this data about people feeling that the PCs could not deliver on their platform, that it was not costed or it was too expensive. There is some concern about that. That did appear in our data. When we asked some of the things that the PCs promised over the election, and we asked people, Do you want them to follow through with this? look at what is at the top. Seventy-three percent of Ontarians said, “Yes, cut my gas tax by 10¢,” including 86% of those who voted Progressive Conservative.

Auditing the finances is a pretty easy one to say yes to: 63% across the province; 80% of which was PC.

On whether to fire that CEO at Hydro One, which you would think was only red meat for the base, no, it is red meat for half of Ontarians, who said that, including 76% of the PC voters.

I will not go through the whole list. You can see the buck-a-beer was not as popular as maybe we had hoped. Look, eliminate cap and trade: 68%. That is something that over-indexed for PC supporters, but almost half of Ontarians said that. Remember, there are people who

did not vote PC who also support or want the government to follow through with getting rid of cap and trade. This is the challenge we see in constant data we do.

On the one hand, people say climate change is an issue we need to deal with. On the other hand, they then also support this.

Let me wrap up, then, by saying what is happening with the other two parties. First of all, it is clear the NDP had a good election. They went from third to second. There were times when they were competitive, in at least the polling that we saw. Perhaps most important, to me—and I think in about the next four years—is the fact that 64% of Ontarians at the end of the campaign said they were open to voting New Democrat, 20 points higher than any other party. While the campaign maybe did not close the deal, it did have an effect of increasing, at least for a moment, the number of people who said “Maybe I would vote NDP.” In this province, given the fact that when Bob Rae was elected, I was 11, it has been something that the parties had to come over. I think they can probably walk away now and say perhaps that that ghost has passed.

Lastly, what did the Liberals do? One of the fascinating things, as I already alluded to in the data, is 28% of Ontarians, when you ask them in our post-election survey, still identify as Liberal. As I said, half of those did not vote for the Liberal Party. They are basically, in terms of base voters, almost have the same numbers of

the Progressive Conservatives.

When you think of Kathleen Wynne, only 17% of Ontarians had a positive impression of her. Twenty-eight percent identify as Liberal. Even at the very worst, the bottoming out of this party, 40% of Ontarians still said at some point they would be open to voting Liberal. I highlight Michael Ignatieff in the corner, there. If you cannot tell who that is, it is the ghost of Ignatieff, who will remind us all that in 2011, that fateful night when we were counting the votes, Mr. Topp’s party came from third almost to first, but at least into the official opposition. People were writing of the Liberals, saying this was now a two-party system; forget them; they are gone. Guess what? We know the answer to that in four years. We now had a Liberal majority government.

In conclusion, the data suggests to me this was a broad-based PC majority. This was not a minority of voters. Well, it was a minority of voters, but it was not a special pocket of voters that came out and overwhelmed the others. This was broad-based. Yes, they did better among older voters than younger, but not by as large margins as we have seen in other elections.

Most of this PC agenda, at least the high-profile stuff, was quite popular. The premier, despite getting flack from his opponents in the opposition, will feel, I think, comfortable moving forward with much of the things that he promised to do—the new premier, by the way.

Concerns over the course of the campaign about Mr.

Ford increased. I think the end of the day was this campaign was not long enough and perhaps the opposition parties did not have enough money, resources or effectiveness to change enough minds and, as a result, we have a PC majority, an NDP opposition and Liberal party asking itself What next? Tom.

TC: Terrific. David said he is old enough to vote, but the organizers said he had to go first, because bedtime.

As you heard, I have seen one or two elections. My conclusion, after years of covering these things is that you are always best to have a debrief on a campaign and election more than two weeks after the event because, from after the event until two weeks, everybody is still very nice: “Oh, you ran a fine campaign,” or, “Yes, you, good fellow public service...”—two weeks is the mark where everybody says, “Okay, I am going to tell you what I really think, now.” We are at that stage. The lovely thing is—to this terrific panel who is here—that David, as much as you are truly an expert in this area, we are not restricted by facts. We argue in an entirely different universe than you do.

Election campaigns, in the end, are all about winning and losing. We like to pretend otherwise, but the simple reality is you win; you lose. That is how it is for the next four years.

I want to start with Brian Topp. Brian, we saw all those numbers and those trendlines that David showed us. It was up, up, up, and at one point you were not only

up, but you were it. Did you win or did you lose?

BT: I will begin answering that question by saying the first election I ever worked on was in a by-election in the riding of Saint-Jacques in eastern Montréal. In the mid-1980s I was two years old. I was 50% of the outreach team. When it was all over, we got together in our little campaign office on Ontario Street, and we had a fabulous party. We sang, and we danced, and we were there all night, very, very happy. We had increased the NDP vote by 100%. We had gone from 1% to 2%.

So I offer you that too as a reasonable baseline for every campaign. Compared to that, this was fabulous. My esteemed friend, here, is now going to live this. Third parties always begin elections by asking themselves, “Are we going to survive?” Ontario Liberals are never to be underestimated, I have learned over the years. The Ontario NDP went through some tough times after the last election. It was a tough internal debate about the campaign. People were unhappy with the campaign, with its tone, with its results. There was a debate in the tribe in which, basically, people said, “Win or lose, we are going to run as ourselves.” The result was a much happier, more relaxed Andrea Horwath, who was campaigning on what she really believed on.

Then, we had the following piece of good fortune. The government was mindful—no doubt, we were as well—that the most accessible next tranche of voters for the New Democrats were Liberals, and we just saw in the

numbers, and they had helpfully validated our platform with their throne speech and budget. Basically, the government, in effect, said, “Everything Andrea wants to run on, we agree with too, and it is good.” I think what they were hoping to do was to hold off her growth and to appropriate her growth, but I think in this case, in this election, the result was the opposite. Since Liberals were having a hard time distinguishing between what the New Democrats were offering and what the Liberals were offering, and since this government had had that experience, so that, essentially, the Liberals convinced their own voters to give the New Democrats a look. To that point, yes, we were winning. Then, we were at the magic point in the campaign, two-thirds of the way into it where the party needed to persuade about five more points to do something they had never done before, which was to vote for the New Democrats and make Andrea Horwath the premier. There, we close did not close the sale, as was said earlier because what was working for us then started to tell against us. People were having a hard time telling the difference between these two parties. People had made a decision, 80% had made a decision: We want change.

The change thing that had been working for us in our world made it tougher to get that last five. The result was, compared to Saint-Jacques, 1985, fabulous. Other major opportunities that were handed the New Democrats they last saw with that federal result that you just

teased me about in 2011, includes a chance to be taken seriously for government next time. And the story that that tells, which is three years about Senator Duffy does not make you prime minister, we are going to have to learn. The business of both being an effective official opposition and, as well, campaigning in the province, defeating the government and then replacing it is something we are going to have to do a better job of. If not a win, it was not bad.

TC: It reminds me of what Stephen Lewis said when the NDP were first elected official opposition in this province. He said, “Thank God a political victory instead of another damn moral victory.” I think that is probably where you are. We know between Omar and Michael, you won, you lost. There is no sort of nuance in there. Omar, I want to know, and you can be honest, just between you and me and a few of our friends, when did you absolutely know that this was going to be a monumental loss?

OK: I, personally, thought, going into that campaign, that victory was unlikely. I thought there was a small glimmer of hope, but it was unlikely. We would have had to pull off a feat unheard of in modern political history, which was win an election when 80%–90% of the electorate, as David pointed out, have a strong desire for change. The strategy going in was to consolidate the Progressive vote around the Liberal choice. I will be honest with the room, here, the senior team knew that

there was a risk in us going so hard after Mr. Ford pre-writ, that a lot of Progressive voters would be scared off and some soft PC voters would be scared off, jump over us and over to the NDP, but it was a calculated risk as the team felt it was something that, at that point, had to be taken. That is exactly what happened in the early stages. We saw, I think as a result of the aggressive Liberal pre-writ ad buy, combined with Andrea's fairly good performance in the first City TV debate, the beginnings of a momentum shift towards the NDP. When did we know that it was done, for sure? There was a lot of conversations preceding the premier's concession.

TC: I am going back like a year; you know what I mean? What year did you know you were done?

OK: Let me go back a little bit. Chris Morley is here, former Chief of Staff, Premier McGuinty. I just want to take a few minutes to talk about the legacy of both Premiers McGuinty and Wynne, if you will allow me that, and then I will answer your questions.

TC: The campaign is over.

OK: Fair enough.

TC: Fair enough you want to talk about the legacy.

MD: The legacy of seven seats.

OK: Touché.

TC: Omar, you will find another way into that. I'll admit it, I am sure.

OK: I will.

TC: I do not mean to deny any party—

OK: This is the third party. We get some speaking time.

TC: Honestly, Omar, if you were an official political party, I would let you do it.

OK: Let me say this, you touched upon this a little bit earlier, after 15 years in government, and governing is not easy; it is hard. There is an accumulated weight to some of the decisions you take. The reason I pointed out to Chris Morley earlier was, I will take the decisions of Dalton McGuinty, Premier McGuinty, to move towards a harmonized combined sales tax, the HST, which at the time, everyone thought it was political suicide. No government in Canadian history had been re-elected after moving to implement a harmonized sales tax. Premier McGuinty did that because it was the right thing to do, because the business community was asking for it at a time coming directly after the 2008 world-wide economic recession. By the way, it was a policy that the Progressive Conservatives had pushed until the Liberals decided to do it. Those decisions—not all of them are always popular. When you make a series of decisions like that and others, over the course of 15 years, that does accumulate a lot of baggage.

I am not one of the Liberals who is going to say that being in power for 15 years is the sole reason we are at seven seats. I think it is probably the reason we lost government. I do not actually think it is the sole reason why we did as badly as we did. I think—and I have said this before, publicly, and I will say it again here

tonight—Ontario Liberals, over the next days, weeks and months, need to do a little bit of soul searching. I think we need to look ourselves in the mirror and realize where we actually lost the trust of Ontarians, because it is clear we did lose the trust of Ontarians at some point over the last four years. I think as we begin the process of rebuilding, that is going to be a critical internal discussion that we, in the party, are going to have.

TC: We are going to get into that. I just point out for those who say any government that has been in power for 10 years or 15 years, inevitably is going to fall off the stage, I do not know if you have ever met Bill Davis. Tories were around for 42 years.

OK: Or Peter Lougheed.

TC: Or Peter Lougheed, for that matter. Okay, now you can take your rightful position in all of this.

When you look back at this campaign, and I know this is a non-political crowd, but they may be interested in this. I was going to ask you What was the one unexpected thing that happened in the campaign? I think I know the answer to that, but in case I am wrong—like conceding the election ten days before the vote, which was kind of an unusual thing to do—I do want to talk about that in general terms for all parties because it was one of newest Hail Mary passes I have ever seen. In terms of the campaign itself, you knew you were going to win walking in. You knew, also, as David's numbers show, that you had a bit of a hot potato on your

hands. The negatives for Doug Ford were fairly high and kept on growing during the campaign. Somebody did suggest that maybe what you should have done in the campaign is sent Doug on an all-inclusive trip down to Mexico for the campaign, and he would have won anyway. How did that work and what was the one unexpected moment that you had?

MD: The single most unexpected thing, for me, in this campaign was that Patrick Brown was not leader and Doug Ford was. It became the most wild, political campaign that I have been involved from that moment onward. Everything was unexpected, not any one single part of this. I think that was a place where, for Omar's party, especially, that was a big problem. A lot of your friends in third party movements spent a lot of time investing in how to destroy Patrick Brown, who all of a sudden was not someone worth destroying. He did a good job of that without the help of CTV all on his own. You wasted a lot of time and a lot of treasure on something that never mattered. That is one place we definitely had a head start compared to Tim Hudak. There were just not the months of destruction thrown at us. That was the surprise that I think really shaped the election.

TC: When the history of this election is finally written, it starts with that night when Patrick Brown ran down the hallway.

MD: It was a staircase.

TC: It was a staircase, whatever, which is a great way to start

a campaign, but in the confines of the campaign itself—and Brian or Omar, jump in on this—let us just kick it around a little bit, this idea that when you know that you are going down to defeat, when basically you are trying to save the furniture, and you have been government for 15 years, and you say, “I have a great idea. Let us say we have lost,” even before the campaign was over. There were some people who were suggesting that maybe she should have said, “Elect me and I will quit,” which would have been an equally interesting Hail Mary pass. Did it work?

OK: I would have liked one more seat. This is a question that political scientists are going to debate for years and decades to come. I will quote Michael’s colleague, Kory Teneycke, who was on the panel with me at our firm a few days ago. Kory said that they had us tracking to one before that announcement and probably saved us about six seats. I can tell you, here, by that point, we had actually stopped most of our polling with the Liberal party, but we were very worried we were tracking to zero.

MD: If you look at the Liberals who won, I think it absolutely paid dividends. They are the folks like Michael Co-teau, Mitzie Hunter, Michael Gravelle, who are definitely stronger local MPPs than a lot of the folks in some of the safer ridings that lost. I think, without a doubt, that proves to me that it worked, and it was still an awful situation that was unprecedented, and I do not think we will see again.

OK: I will also say I think it was a bit of a selfish act on behalf of the premier.

TC: See, I told you about that two-week rule.

OK: Whatever you think of the policies of Premier Wynne, no one can argue that that was an easy thing to do.

MD: It was selfish to seek re-election, frankly.

OK: It is time to be nonpartisan.

TC: I want to get right in on this. Would you have advised that, Brian?

BT: We are past the two weeks.

TC: Yes, we are. The voters, in fact, were wrong, and yes.

BT: I will say the McGuinty government, Premier Wynne, had their moments. I do want to say that up front. History will be kinder to them than this election was. That said, I think Premier Wynne, I think, made two big mistakes in her premiership. The first was the privatization of Hydro One, which blew their brains out, and I reckon that was where the election was lost by the Liberals. I strongly believe that these moves of overthinking elections and of conceding them always have the result that this one had.

Let me refer to the New Democrats. When you have decided in much of this country that you are going to vote for the NDP, you have made a decision, contrary to most of the observable evidence around you. You have decided to ignore political polling; you have decided to ignore what your mom thinks; you have decided, “I do not care what all the signs are in my neighbourhood;

I have decided I want this party to run.” I spent a fair bit of money once trying to prove this to my colleagues in the tribe that when people make that decision, they actually want us to be the government. If that is true, they do not care about the polls; they do not care about the other parties; they do not care about the media; they do not care about their neighbours; they do not care about mom; they have decided to vote NDP. There is only one group that can persuade you not to vote for the NDP, and that is the NDP. If the party says we cannot win, then you are telling your voters you might as well look somewhere else for where the government is. Most people are looking for the government. These polling numbers, which show that half the Liberal vote voted elsewhere, would suggest this was a disastrous technique. If I can be blunt about it, and here I will just talk about the principle of it, I think it is disrespectful of the voters to play games like that with the elections. What you owe them—and I offer this to you as a bit of counsel in this fun spot of being the third party—is your best shot; give it your best shot.

OK: Not a party, yet.

BT: Try. Give it everything you can. Talk passionately just to the last minute. God bless us all, Bob Rae, who was one of yours, at the end of his term, never gave up. He just argued and argued and argued and argued to the last minute that Premier Harris would be wrong for the province, which in my view, was right, and he saved 18

seats and got the best electoral result that a Democrat was to have, until this election. Do not give up.

OK: Like I said, either this is going to be debated by political scientists and pundits for years to come—

BT: Let us debate it now.

OK: We are where we are. It was a decision that was made. Some folks were in favour of it; some folks were against it. At the end of the day, it was the premier’s decision. That was the decision. This is where we are. As Liberals, now, we have to think, “Where do we go from here?” I think, obviously, we have to look at decisions of the past and there needs to be accountability for decisions that were wrong, and there needs to be congratulations for decisions that were right. I really think the focus of our party needs to be on the future moving to a new generation of leaders, both within the party, within the caucus, attracting new people into the party. This notion that the Liberal party is dead is ludicrous. We have tens of thousands of members across this province. We had over 1 million votes in this election. Quite frankly, with all due respect to Brian and his party, if the NDP cannot win this election where the Ontario Liberals were at a historic low, below 1923, in terms of the popular vote, if they could not win this election with Doug Ford as leader with such high negatives, what election are they going to win?

BT: The next one.

OK: We will see. We will see. If you could not win this one,

I am not holding my breath.

TC: While Brian and Omar have been debating the merits of third-party politics, Michael is sitting there going, “Whatever!”

MD: We are government. If I could just touch on some of the mistakes Kathleen Wynne made. In the movie *Traffic*—

OK: You spent too much on pizza?

MD: I am going to talk about that. You have to ask Brian and I before you ask questions. In the movie *Traffic*, there is a scene where Michael Douglas is becoming the drug czar. His predecessor gives him two envelopes. He says, “You open this one when you hit your first scandal, and you open this one when you hit your second scandal.” You hit the first scandal, and you open up the envelope, and it says, “Blame me for everything.” Kathleen Wynne did a great job of blaming Dalton McGuinty before the 2014 for absolutely everything. Then she won. The problem is she did not open up that second envelope, which said, “Resign.”

TC: It is a good question. Politicians, traditionally, no matter what party they are in, tend to overstay their welcome. That, more often than not, writes the script for various elections.

OK: The results would indicate that perhaps a different decision run up to the election would have been better, but hindsight is always 20/20. Of course, we are at seven seats. Could somebody have done better? Probably. You never know until you go through the process. This

is why I think, for all the Liberals in the room, I would say this is not a very productive conversation at this point.

TC: You do know this is the Albany Club. I just want to point that out.

OK: There are a few. I see a few hiding in the back, there.

MD: Membership forms are on the front desk.

OK: Rehashing whether she should have left, and considering whether we could have won with somebody else is not a very productive conversation right now because we are at seven seats. We are going to need every one, every volunteer, the tens of thousands of our grassroots to be engaged, but looking forward. That is what I would say to my fellow Liberals: We can argue about the past over drinks at the pool—Michael Diamond and I do that sometimes—but the productive conversation now is what do we do moving forward. We need to re-define liberalism in a way that is relevant for Ontarians in the modern world.

That is something that Mr. Ford was actually very good at. I do not agree with the vast majority of his policies, but he explained them in ways that made it seem relevant to everyday people. We, as Ontario Liberals, lost the middle class in this election. Absolutely, across the board in every region, we lost the middle class.

MD: Fifteen of years of a war on them, it seems to make sense.

OK: Come on, you have four years to talk. We used to be the

party for the little guy. Jean Chrétien was the little guy from Shawinigan. We lost the little guy. We have to win the little guy back moving forward.

TC: Michael, let me throw it to you for a while. I do not want to get into policy so much as I want to keep on the political track on this. You walked into this campaign with a leader that had very few connections in the party with a policy that sort of reflected what Patrick Brown had, but at the same time, did not.

MD: There were some distinct, huge differences.

TC: Yes, and by some measures, he promised as much as \$40 billion and cutting revenues, which would be a really interesting trick. How do you manage, politically? It is like the old story about the dog finally catches the car and says, “Now, what do I do?” You have got to manage disappointment, now, for a while in terms of you go back to David’s numbers. What promises do even Conservatives want Doug Ford to keep? It is not 100%.

MD: A buck-a-beer is free, but apparently it is not all that popular. I am a little disappointed to see that. Have you tried buck-a-beer?

TC: Yes.

MD: I do not drink canned beer, but the platform obviously came together in an unusual way. We did not have the year plus that the typical leader would have to put together the platform they want. What was very important for us during the leadership and during the provincial

election, and since we were not attacked on it, and what the other parties thought would be foolish was getting out of cap and trade and fighting a carbon tax. That was, obviously, key to us. We also know that the province is in more of a mess than we can even anticipate, so one of the key promises was the Committee of Inquiry to get to the bottom of just how much waste and mismanagement was going on for the last 15 years. I think it is going to take time. Our platform was fairly—a lot of our promises are very achievable quickly. Some are longer term goals, not stretched goals like Kathleen Wynne ran on in 2014, but they are things that I think will be accomplished. We just need to get the province in order first.

TC: I do not want to lean on experience here, but I think on John A. Macdonald’s second go round as prime minister, the first thing was he said, “I had no idea what a mess the finances were in.” This is something that every government has said since time immemorial.

MD: Justin Trudeau did not have to say that.

TC: No.

MD: He took over with pretty good...

OK: The deficit was—

TC: Let me ask you this because it was a debate in Conservative circles, certainly around the leadership convention with Doug Ford being the ultimate outsider in all of this. David says, and you may be right, that he is not a populist. That would be an interesting discussion to have. Is he a Conservative?

MD: Absolutely. He is a Conservative who resonates on a commonsense level with folks across the political spectrum.

TC: A classic Conservative does not necessarily go and promise passenger service up in Northern Ontario, again. That is a Liberal thing to do or an NDP thing to do.

MD: He is a pragmatist, and he is an Ontarian. He knows that services are important to folks across the province. He is not going to slash and burn things that folks depend on.

BT: It is a populist platform. It is more than a populist platform. It is magical thinking. It was the magic sauce that I think booted it home for the Tories, but now they have a very serious problem because, exactly as we saw, the public expects this to happen. Much of what has been committed by this government—sorry, we are past the two weeks—is ridiculous. It is similar to how Christy Clark went around in British Columbia in 2013. Her hands would go like this, and she would go, “LNG is going to give us \$100 billion. Look at the stars between my hands. Vring: \$100 billion is going to come magically to British Columbia. We are going to cut your taxes, build your hospitals, build your schools. It is all going to be beautiful.” None of it, of course, happened.

MD: Then, she was re-elected until the Greens and the Democrats made a deal.

BT: Here we have Doug Ford, god bless his soul. He is not

Donald Trump. He is not a vicious bigot, to his credit. He is running on a different playbook.

OK: I do not think he is a bigot at all.

BT: No, I do not think so. I think, actually, a beautiful breakthrough among new Canadians. Just look at what he committed to. Ten cents off the price of gas. The Government of Ontario cannot deliver that. It can cut its taxes by 10% if it wants and add it to the deficit, but, unless you are imposing price controls, I think there is a 50% chance that gas prices will be higher. Cut electricity by an additional 12%? The Liberals, recklessly, are spending net \$2 billion a year into the provincial deficit, hidden through a debt trick to temporarily subsidize electricity rates, and the Conservatives have proposed to add \$1 billion to that with all of this to blow up three years from now in what will be a 25%–30% rate increase. That does not add up.

MD: Like the NDP platform where they needed glue sticks to put up the right numbers.

BT: You cannot cut revenue, increase spending and balance the budget. That is why they did not do a platform.

OK: I am going to say something nice about the Conservative team right now—the Progressive Conservatives team. I think one of the very smart moves that Mr. Ford has done is bring in people like Michael onto his team, but people like Jenni Byrne, Kory Teneycke, Chris Froggatt, have deep experience in actually governing. Again, I do not agree with a lot of their policies, but no one can

argue that they do not know how to govern. I hope, and if I speak to them—I am speaking to you now—I would say the promise to cut 4% across the board is something that the public will forgive you for not fulfilling because 4% across the board, if you just take it out of the Health Department’s budget, is \$2.5 billion. I was Chief of Staff to the Minister of Health for two and a half years; I know you cannot do that without ravaging healthcare services on the frontline. I am telling you here, today, if Mr. Ford comes out and says whatever excuse he uses—the deficit is too high—whatever.

MD: There will not be an excuse. It is not going to be about frontline cuts; you all wasted enough of our money over the last 15 years.

OK: Let me finish. This promise was reckless. He does not have to say that. This promise is not something we can fulfil at this time. I will come out, and I will say that is the right thing to do.

MD: I am sure when that magical moment when Doug Ford adopts Kathleen Wynne’s policy and then you come out and praise it, I look forward to listening to that on AM640, but...

OK: Next Thursday?

TC: You see what I mean about the two-week rule, right?

MD: I think that Doug has actually done this, and he will do it again.

TC: Let us just take a break here for a second. I am painfully aware because, as somebody said, it is 2018 that we tend

to be a certain type of person sitting here on the panel, all male, so we have a few minutes left, I think, Taylor, and we are going to open it up for questions or comments. The only thing is I know this is a really shy room, so we need somebody to get it going, but if you could keep your comment or question fairly brief, so we could get a few in, that would be really great.

OK: I would just say, this is an all-male panel, but one of the positives coming out of this election is we have seen a big boost in the percentage of female members in all of the parties. I think that is something we should all applaud.

Questions & Answers

Q: As a senior with children and grandchildren and so on, I have always been kind of proud of our Canadian system and the politicians. I know we can all throw stones and criticize, but somehow it has always worked. Do you believe that—as Canada, or in Ontario now—it is still working and will work? Tom, that is actually for you.

TC: I think that is a very relevant question and is one that has been brought into sharp focus, I think, by particularly what is happening south of the border and what is increasingly happening elsewhere in Europe. I think that, while we are debating left and right—and we did not even get into the question of what has happened to

the centre of politics in this province—we are entering an age where we are fighting a very different type of political battle. I think the question is relevant. Are we going to get through it? We are going to get through it better than anybody else. Are we going to get through this?

This is just my opinion. Are going to get through this in a way that resembles the civility that we have had in the past? I do not think so. I think that what I love about politics in this province—and these three guys are terrific examples of it—is that you can fight hard; you can argue hard, but then everybody goes for a drink afterwards.

If I can have just 20 seconds for a story: Back in the days when I was a young reporter at Queen’s Park, I was watching a late-night debate. Bill Davis was the premier and Stephen Lewis was the leader of the opposition. Lewis was in full flight. In those days, when Stephen Lewis came into the House to speak, the galleries filled up because he was such a great orator. All the benches were filled; the galleries were filled. Lewis had been speaking for about 20 minutes. Then, none other than the premier, himself, stood up on a point of order. It was sort of a weird point of order. It did not make any sense. The speaker could not make any hide nor hair of it, and ruled the point of order out. And the premier sat down with a smile on his face. Three minutes later, Stephen Lewis wrapped up his speech and everybody went home. Two days later, I bumped into Davis, and I said, “Sir, you have got to explain something to me. I do not know why—

what was that point of order thing in Lewis’ speech?” He said, “Oh, that. Well, Stephen and I had a dinner reservation for 8:00, and I was just letting him know.” That is what we used to have. I do not think we are there. Anyway, anybody else?

Q: This question is for Michael. Michael, we heard what David said about the mandate that the Ontarians gave your party, but I would like to hear from you and maybe the team, the Conservative team. What mandate do you believe you have received from the Ontario people in terms of what issues that you think you need to move on?

MD: I think number one, and one of the first orders of business, is getting out of cap and trade and fighting the federal government on carbon tax.

Wow, we do not get that much. That is good. I would say, number one, would be that, and restoring fiscal sanity to this province would be the other. I think you are going to see those are going to be the two places where it is very near to the premier-designate’s heart. It is something that he focused on with his brother at Toronto City Hall. I think that is what we are going to see being the most important thing at Queen’s Park.

Q: Thanks very much. I guess this is for all three, but mostly for our Progressive Conservative colleague. I am interested to know how you are going to engage citizens and, in the healthcare area, patient representatives and patients, moving forward in making

your decisions in areas that are relevant to particular groups? I think this has been something that we have felt fell by the wayside over time in this province, and I think we feel that we have not been listened to often, and we have been just told what is good for us. How are you going to make sure that we are working with you to let you know what is good for us?

MD: Throughout the election and the leadership, Doug continuously—sorry the premier-designate—talked about the need to consult the most impacted stakeholders. In healthcare, that is, obviously, patients, families and front-line workers. I think you will see a high reliance on the expertise from those who live within the system, work within the system and are the face—not the paper pushers.

BT: From the perspective of the New Democrats, there is a lesson to learn from the experience of the last five years in Ottawa. That is that the challenge function that you acquire in parliament when you are official opposition cannot be all you do. Actually, in your question is the other half of the job, which is official opposition, whose job is to provide an alternative to the government. It is going to have to work really, really hard all across the province to be like that where the public is coming from within the government.

I joked in a previous panel that I did: I think this government is going to be a target-rich environment, and the trick is going to be to not miss that opportunity and that

is not just about asking questions that the media like in question period. The public does not care about that. It is to stay close to the public and be speaking about what they care about as they understand where this government is going. Cut taxes, increase spending, balance the budget does not add up. That is going to play itself out in the next two to three years, and then they are going to be looking for something better.

OK: Just to the question on working with patients and patient groups, I take solace in the fact that Christine Elliott has been elected as a Member of Provincial Parliament. I had the pleasure of working with her when she was the Patient Ombudsperson for the Province of Ontario. I think whatever portfolio she has, I assume she is going to have a cabinet portfolio. I am not going to presume what that will be, but I hope, and I believe, that around that cabinet table, somebody like Christine will be a real advocate for really continuing a patient-centred approach to healthcare in this province. See, I can say nice things if I have to.

TC: I was worried there for a minute.

Q: A lot of the discussion tonight has been about tactics. I want to ask a question about substance, because there was hardly any of it in the election campaign. I have looked at three economic forecasts recently for Canada. For the next three years, we never get above 2%. That is a huge constraint on what governments can do. Secondly, we have a big deficit. We have prom-

ised to deal with that. Thirdly, we have an aging society, which leads to rising healthcare costs. Fourthly, we have massive population growth occurring over the next 20 years in Southwestern Ontario, including the GTA, which will require massive investments.

The government has promised to cut taxes in spite of all of this and to deliver on this. I do not see how this computes. How can you meet public services and continue to have tax cuts? Every political party seems to feel that it has to have tax cuts in its program. The costs are going to go up. Building a better society in Southern Ontario, healthcare, dealing with the deficit. I have not even mentioned climate change. One little sign of that is what is happening with Lyme Disease across this province. I know of two cases now where people have suffered permanent neurological damage, which constrains the rest of their life because ticks are coming in here due to the change in climate. To laugh at climate change and say we do nothing is irresponsible. We need governments that govern for the future, not in political parties that are just playing short-term tactics.

TC: Thanks very much.

MD: I am not sure if there is a question in there. One, I do not think you can change the temperature-controlled ticks by bringing in the tax. Number two, the voters wanted the tax cuts, that is why they voted for us. That is what David's number said. It is their money, and the government

should work for them, not for other interests. The leadership is absolutely doing what the will of the electorate is.

TC: You have promised fiscal sanity.

MD: Absolutely, up 4%.

TC: In four years?

MD: It will depend how bad things are. We are not going to harm people. We will not harm people, but we have to get a handle on that first.

BT: Let us just talk about this one a bit more. This is a very interesting question. It is actually, I think at the heart of the challenge facing the Province of Ontario in the next four years—that question that you just asked. Let us begin by saying there is no question this jurisdiction is heavily indebted. There was a time when the Conservatives cared about that. There is a serious fiscal challenge. It is manageable, but it is a serious debt pile that needs to be managed. There is no question about it. I am speaking strictly for myself, here. We are all just hearing from us, here. I think it can be argued fiscally and economically for the reasons you just said that a tax cut for the people who need help the least is the last thing the province needs.

By the way, a majority of the people of Ontario did not vote for it, bearing in mind we are in the system that we are in. The root of it is quite right. I think the nostrums that the government are offering, which do not add up, are not going to make anything better. In fact, in many

ways, I think what we will end up with is an Ontario that looks the way Toronto did after Ford Nation was running Toronto, which is going to be a whole bunch of wasted time where nothing much happens, and a bunch of money gets spent to no good effect. And then we are going to have to start again from scratch. The issues that you have talked about are the heart of the matter. This government has no answer to it. It is essentially just playing with magical thinking. It worked beautifully, but it solves no problems.

MD: This government has been sworn in.

OK: That is a good point. This government has been sworn in. I am willing to give, as I said before, to give them the benefit of the doubt, because I do think there are a lot of smart people there. A couple of things I will say just on the global economic trends. We are seeing tightening, for sure; we are going to see more, likely, especially, if the Americans come in with 25%-across-the-board-tariff on auto imports.

To the Kathleen Wynne economic record, I know the campaign is over, but these are facts. Under Kathleen Wynne, we just get the last 5% that brings you over the top. That is going to be a combination of what people make of the record of the government and what they think of the forward offer that the Democrats will make.

OK: I talked earlier about how we lost the middle class across the board. I wish we could have talked about some of our policies that would have directly benefited people in

the middle class, like free preschool, like free tuition, less in a Deputy-Minister-policy-wonk type of way that everyone in this room appreciates, I know, but more in a way that my father-in-law, who is a small business owner, new Canadian from Turkey would be able to understand and appreciate. I will leave that for the communications experts to give me advice on later.

TC: We have set some sort of record here tonight in that we have had a terrific political discussion, and I believe not once did anybody bring up Donald Trump, which is incredible, especially as we go forward. Every politician I have met, who has been elected, starts off as a regionalist and a nationalist, and ends up being an internationalist by the end because of the nature of the job. Doug Ford is going to have to learn how to deal with Donald Trump and everything that happens south of the U.S.

MD: Donald Trump will have to learn to deal with Doug Ford.

TC: I do not think he really—I am not sure he cares.

MD: Welcome to Ford Nation. Welcome, welcome.

The passports are in the mail. It is going to be a great four years.

TC: On that note, I am going to thank Michael, Omar and Brian. Great discussion. Thank you all very much. It was great.

BJ: Thank you, Tom. As I alluded to earlier, if I can just keep your attention for a few more minutes, I am in the waning hours of my presidency, and it seems to me

there is little point in holding this podium if one does not put it to effect on occasion. I would just ask all of our panelists to remember the environment in the months ahead. That would be my request. I would like now to call upon Chris Loreto, Principal at StrategyCorp, to thank our panelists.

**Note of Appreciation, by Chris Loreto,
Principal, StrategyCorp**

I am so glad we picked the hottest day of the year to do tonight's presentation. I literally just finished drying off, and now I am all wet again. Sincerely, thank you to everybody who came out tonight. I hope you enjoyed it. I want to thank our panelists for relitigating the election, but actually providing the insights. I do want to say to all three of you, good on you for being involved in the central campaigns. Everybody in this room who was involved in the democratic process some less than two weeks ago, you should be commended, and we should be encouraging more people in our neighbourhoods to get involved in the process, regardless of what party that they support.

Congratulations, to the Tories. Congratulations, to the New Democrats on forming official opposition. The Liberals are never down and out. Good luck with the rebuilding of the party. As a Conservative who was there in 1993, that was my first membership. It is a long road, but it should be a reward-

ing one to get you back to being a strong party in our system.

Tom, thank you, as always, for great moderation and on behalf of StrategyCorp, again, thank you everybody. Drive safely. Thank you.

Concluding Remarks, by Barbara Jesson

At the Empire Club, we pride ourselves on bringing rich discussion like this to our podium. Hello. A little commercial for the sponsors because, without them, we would not have had tonight. Thank you to the Toronto Real Estate Board, OMERS and StrategyCorp for making the event possible.

I also want to thank mediaevents.ca, for once again taking our discussion to a wider audience through their podcasts. Follow us on social media.

Finally, I am hoping to see you all tomorrow at our final event of the season, "Blockchain Revolution," featuring Don Tapscott.

Thank you so much for coming out tonight and for your support.