

Would-be leaders court Liberal faithful



**NORTHERN
INSIGHTS**

by Larry Sanders



It had all the elements of a traditional wedding ceremony; something old, something new, something borrowed and something blue. The event in Thunder Bay Nov. 17 was the second in a series of debates among the five men and one woman wanting to be the next leader of the Liberal Party of Ontario.

"Something old" was symbolized by the building in which the debate was held: the Prince Arthur Hotel. The ancient building's heating system rattled on with distracting pops, bangs and whistles all afternoon, putting punctuation marks in all the wrong places in the speakers' oratorical flourishes.

"Something new" was the ostentatious government building with its towering silver columns overshadowing the hotel, reminding everyone of the Liberal government's legacy of transferring government jobs to the north.

"Something borrowed" was David Ramsay, the former New Democrat, now more at home in a free enterprise party. As a turncoat New Democrat, Liberals aren't likely to trust Ramsay to be anything more than a committed Liberal caucus member. In a troubled period of political renewal, Liberals are more likely to cling to certainties and to those with unchanging principles.

"Something blue" was Steve Mahoney, the only candidate not a former Liberal cabinet minister, who plugged his outsider status, frequently criticizing the Liberal government's legacy from a right-wing, pro-business perspective that sounded like it came from the "blue" party, the Conservatives. Mahoney will receive support from those Liberals unhappy with Peterson's legacy, but he won't gain enough support from the party rank-and-file to win.

"Something old" was also evident in the other four candidates, clearly the front runners—Lyn McLeod, Greg Sorbara, Murray Elston and Charles Beer.

McLeod was crowd favourite

McLeod was the local favourite, drawing the most sustained and sincere applause. Prior to Murray Elston's entry into the race, McLeod was also touted by the southern Ontario media as the overall front runner. But Elston, the interim leader, entered the race at the eleventh hour, with all the advantages and disadvantages of incumbency.

Elston is the strongest defender of the Peterson government's legacy, and will be supported by Liberals who want another somewhat bland but intelligent leader. Elston will be rejected by those who want a real change, and by those who feel betrayed by Elston breaking an unstated "deal" that an interim leader should have remained interim, and not seek the leadership personally.

Sorbara is the best orator of the bunch. His voice trailed off to a whisper at times, only to rush back with near shouts of flourish and excitement. He also has the best speech writer, since he drew heavily on local symbols like the Terry Fox Monument and the Sleeping Giant to paint his picture of reforms in a Liberal future. His platform calls for permanently doing away with the reason the Liberals lost the September 1990 election—calling it too early—by instituting a fixed four-year term of office for the provincial legislature. He told the delegates, "if you're looking for a candidate committed to fundamental reform (of the Liberal party and government policy), I'm your candidate."

Liberalism is the middle ground

Liberalism is the politics of finding the middle ground. Mahoney claimed "we're trapped between the Conservatives, who want to make us all into Americans, and the NDP, who want to make us all into Swedes." I disagree. The Liberals are not "trapped" in that position—they've always been there. Historically, the Liberal Party has always been the one trying hardest to mark out a middle ground supposedly acceptable to the majority.

As McLeod put it, "The party that wins the next election will be the one that proves it has earned the trust of the people." Trust is an ephemeral commodity that can't be packaged into an election commercial and sold by marketing gurus. Peterson lost it by not respecting how sophisticated voters have become—able to see through his transparent attempt to win another majority while riding high in the polls, rather than being willing to carry on governing for the rest of his mandate through a difficult recession.

Whether the Liberal will regain the voters' trust depends on their ability to rediscover the old formula that worked so often for the party at the federal level, and seems to be working in western Canada, given the results of the recent Saskatchewan and British Columbia elections—finding a mix of the old, the new, the borrowed, and the blue—a recipe for "middleness". The historical quirk of 1990 was that Bob Rae was not voted IN—Peterson was voted OUT. Coming to power on a negative mandate, the Rae team has not yet indicated it has the ability to govern, or articulate a direction people can vote FOR. Thus, the next election becomes one for the Liberals to lose, just like the last one, unless they find their recipe again.

Letters to the editor

What happened to Pet Talk?

Dear editor,
We would like to enquire as to what happened to your "Pet Talk" column. It was very informative and one of the better columns in your paper. Thank you.

Sincerely,
O. Smith
Rossport

Editor's note: Pet Talk is back this issue, and will be run in the future whenever space permits.

Too much paper is wasted

Dear editor,
I am writing to complain about the senseless waste of paper by the different businesses in our area. I was in a restaurant in Marathon recently and every available wall space was covered by the same paper asking people to book their Christmas parties early. One wall actually had about eight posters in a straight row—all the same.

Do they think the public is so stupid they can't get the message from one poster? A far more sensible and appreciated approach would have been to display one or two posters in a prominent location and to use the rest of the space for attractive pictures or holiday decorations.

There are several businesses in Terrace Bay that practice the same wanton display of advertisement. Running 20 or so ads up and down the wall is ridiculous. It only serves to annoy people, not draw them in to spend any money.

People will buy what they want to and no amount of paper pressure will change their minds.

In this time of recycling and reforestation, I hate to think how many trees were destroyed in order for me to read about 100 times over that I can save 15 per cent on lipstick.

Carolyn Williams
Terrace Bay

Hockey bag stolen

Dear editor,
Last Sunday, after a Peewee tournament in Schreiber, Teddy Glad's hockey bag, with all of his equipment, was taken out of the back of his father's truck.

I don't know why anyone would choose to destroy any kid's dreams of a great hockey season by doing this. Teddy's name is on all of his equipment. The bag was blue with a black bottom.

We would appreciate any information anyone has about this. If the person who took it would return it, we would consider it "being found on the side of the road." Please call 825-3398.

Thank you
Susan Glad
Terrace Bay

Careful what you feed the birds

Dear editor,
In our zealotness to attract birds to our feeding stations, are we harming them with the suet we buy from the butcher, and with peanut butter and suet balls from the store? This question was recently asked by a participant in our Backyard Sanctuary Programme of Ontario. Within this packet we state:

"Although it is believed that fat (suet) will help the birds make it through the colder season, they are quite capable of staying warm. If you are obtaining the fat from either cattle or pigs, you are obtaining all the ingredients in that animal that have simply solidified into fat. When birds eat suet, peanut butter, etc., it increases their need to drink fluids and in winter a good drink of water is hard to find, thus causing extra stress. Fat is not natural in their diets; it clogs their anatomy and does not allow the excrement to be released properly.

Fat also changes the cycle of growth. One of the main functions of birds is to eat various portions of the earth—and to ingest it and expel what is not necessary. When they expel it, it promotes growth to other areas of the earth. It essentially spreads seeds. So if they are ingesting fat and it surrounds and coats the seeds, it could stop growth."

But most dramatic occurs when the temperature changes. If it stays cold and the fat remains frozen, little extra damage is done. But when the temperature rises and the fat softens, it turns rancid and can poison the bird!

The store-purchased suet balls are another question—what do they contain? Are their preservatives in it to keep the shelf life? And what about the fluctuation in the store's temperature? Our fondness for our little feathered friend must go further than the joy of watching them feed—it must extend to a concern for their welfare.

The Backyard Wildlife Sanctuary Programme was set up to help individuals maintain their backyards as feeding stations. It contains an outdoor weatherproof sign, feeding hints, plans for building bird and duck houses and other information.

Judi Sundland,
Rossport