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What's new is old

The year in politics is already starting to take shape with the ongoing threat of a federal election and the certain promise of a fall provincial election.

On the federal front, the Conservative party has launched a series of attack ads in what appears to be a pre-emptive strike at Stéphane Dion and the latest incarnation of the Liberal party. The style and content of the ads are very similar to the attack ads used by the Liberals

free press

editorial

laurie brett

against Stephen Harper that led to the short-lived Paul Martin government.

In continuing to style themselves as the "new" Canadian gov-

ernment, Stephen Harper's Conservatives are already starting to appear old and tired in their approach, resorting to the least civil but easiest method of discrediting one's opponent. Haven't we been through this before? Surely there's more to be gained by taking the moral high road and trumpeting achievements or plans for progress.

Locally, it looks like the Tory camp could also have benefited from a bit of sage advice on political restraint. When Conservative campaign manager Nick Kouvalis was acquitted in late January of uttering a death threat against Essex MP Jeff Watson, the judge said he was "troubled" by evidence that the charge was politically motivated. Suggestions of collaboration by key witnesses were enough to raise doubts about the motives involved in filing the charge. Political tensions within the party rank and file are certainly not uncommon, but there's little to be gained by dragging a party's dirty laundry through the courthouse corridors.

Dirty laundry will also find its way into attempts to discredit the provincial Liberals in the lead-up to the fall provincial election. Indeed, rumblings have already been heard in relation to this week's three byelections in the Toronto area. Opponents have decried Premier Dalton McGuinty's broken promises on everything from tax hikes to coal plant closures – something we're sure to hear much more about in the coming months.

What's new quickly becomes old and what's "old news" tends to resurface time and time again when the political world runs out of original ideas. Wouldn't it be refreshing to have a political campaign based solely on the issues and what each party plans to do about them? This is particularly true in regard to the environment, currently the number one priority among Canadians. It is not particularly surprising that governments have not lived up to their rhetoric, but constantly appealing for support on the basis of the shortcomings of opponents makes the entire election process seem like a choice among dismal options.

The problem with constantly throwing mud around is that no one feels very clean in the end.



...AND SO IT WAS THAT THE GROUNDHOG PREDICTED SIX MORE WEEKS OF POLITICIANS SLINGING MUD AT EACH OTHER.. MAKE THAT MONTHS!

Forty-five years ago, the Cuban missile crisis threatened the planet with thermonuclear war. The Soviet Union, at the height of the Cold War, installed nuclear missiles in Cuba, only 90 miles from the Florida coast. President Kennedy spoke gravely to the American people on TV. People flocked to supermarkets to stock up on food and other necessities, as if somehow this would protect them. Had the missiles been launched, the President and cabinet would have been airlifted out of Washington.

The Canadian government had constructed an underground bunker for its leaders, later dubbed the 'Diefenbunker' after the prime minister of the day, John Diefenbaker. (Diefenbaker never visited the site outside Ottawa, which, today, is a museum.)

Here in Essex, life went on. I recall the crisis being discussed in Mr. Murray's history class at EDHS. Then the history teacher was also the current events teacher, in a day when four history credits were neces-

sary for an Ontario Grade 12 graduation diploma.

I don't think any of us realized the depth of the crisis. Youth always feels they are indestructible.



opinion

bill gay

Nevertheless, cooler heads prevailed and Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev ordered the missiles, which if fired would have reached us in about 10 minutes, carted and shipped back to Russia. An American naval blockade turned away Soviet ships bound for what President Kennedy described as "that imprisoned island", and U-2 surveillance confirmed the threat indeed over. The movie *Thirteen Days* offers

an excellent account of the story.

Skip ahead to the present. A very ill Fidel Castro still rules in Cuba, a nation that continues to fall under an American economic embargo despite eight changes in presidential leadership since Kennedy's time.

Canadians make Cuba a favourite winter vacation destination. The Cold War has been replaced by the war on terror that sees NATO troops including a large contingent of Canadian Forces personnel in Afghanistan, now awaiting the Taliban's spring offensive.

The threat now is not like the ominous mass annihilation of 45 years ago that nuclear war would have brought, but more insidious dangers from suicide bomber attacks in Kandahar, to plane hijacking, to biochemical warfare. The list is endless.

And today, like the days of the Cuban missile crisis, the kids take the bus or march on foot to the same high school as we did, just another day at EDHS.

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