

Ford's timing impeccable

By Brian Lockhart

It came as quite a surprise for a lot of people when Doug Ford managed to win the leadership of the Ontario Progressive Conservative recently.

Former leader Patrick Brown's sudden and unexpected fall from grace caught both the party and the public off guard and left a rather large hole at top of the party that needed to be filled ? and fast.

With a provincial general election scheduled for June 7, the Conservatives were left scrambling to find a new leader that could engage the public and put in place policies that would lead the party into a successful election campaign.

Several capable people stepped up, notably Christine Elliott, widow of former federal Finance minister Jim Flaherty, who is an experienced politician herself and former member of Provincial Parliament. It was Elliott's third attempt to win the party leadership, having lost previously to Tim Hudak and Mr. Brown.

And then there was Caroline Mulroney, daughter of the former prime minister, who had some name recognition, but Ontario probably wasn't ready for a provincial leader based on family ties. Unlike the U.S., having a well-known surname doesn't seem to cut much weight in this province.

It was the party leadership convention and vote that ended up making the big news, at least at first, rather than the result itself. It was a debacle with several thousand votes not even counted.

There was turmoil when it was discovered that while a leader had been chosen, the result of the election was being contested. At best, journalists on site were guessing what was going on as no official announcements were being made.

In the end, Doug Ford came out as the top dog and will lead the party into the June election. While the mess at the convention took immediate criticism from anti-conservative groups, the hoopla quickly died down.

Conservative enemies tried to spin the scandal into an attack that questioned how a party that can't even run their own election properly could actually run a successful government. Cooler heads prevailed over all and it was pointed out that it was a small group of administrators who had created such a mess ? not the political candidates.

So Doug Ford, well known for his late brother Rob's antics, and former Toronto city councilor and unsuccessful candidate for mayor against John Tory, will possibly be the next Premier of Ontario.

Well-known for his fiscally conservative policies, Ford was immediately compared to U.S. president Donald Trump for some reason.

They may both be on the right side of the political spectrum but other than that a comparison is absurd.

Ford has never made decisions based on race or ethnic background or immigration. In fact, Ford's popularity is spread out along those lines and he's a popular figure in his hometown of Etobicoke which is ethnically diverse, based on his conservative views of stopping out-of-control government spending.

The comparison to Trump also quickly dissipated in the news when most people just didn't buy in to the comparison.

So far, Ford has made his intentions very clear if he is elected. Like his rather famous brother, he's a straight shooter. He doesn't turn into a double-talking politician who dodges every question and spins it into a reference to 'starting a committee' or 'doing a study' on the subject.

And the subjects that don't really matter - he laughs them off like a regular guy.

Ford has three months of handshaking and baby kissing ahead of him before the election.

There is little doubt that Ontario is due for a change. After 15 years of Liberal government, a lot of people will vote for change just because that's enough of one party in power and sometimes you've just got to get some new blood at Queens Park.

It's going to be an interesting election for sure. You never know until the votes are counted how it's going to turn out.

Despite a rather rocky start in the convention to get to the top, Ford seems to be gaining momentum. His strategy is the total opposite of current Premier Kathleen Wynne's government.

If anything, Ford's timing couldn't be better.