

My incompetence at clairvoyance was entirely predictable

More to the Story

By Ben Bennett

A thousand years ago, as a columnist in Collingwood, I used this rather clever headline (I thought) to explain why I was enjoying a hearty meal of crow after my Christmas turkey.

Like many of us who write opinion columns, I fell victim to the prediction trap. And for the most part, I was way off base. You'd think I would learn. Nope.

Last January I fell into the same trap. In my first column of the year, I noted Stephen Harper, Kathleen Wynne and Karen Farbridge were heading the three governments that we vote and pay for, and "the year will end the same way."

I am claiming two out of three.

There was a lot of talk about Harper resigning or calling a snap election. Neither happened and I am still staying out on the limb that I climbed on to last January when I suggested he will resign this spring if it looks likely he would lose to Justin Trudeau in the fall. (I have some crow in the freezer, just in case.)

On the provincial front, I sort of got it right, predicting Kathleen Wynne would stay in power and that her victory would be the end of Tim Hudak. And if, as looks likely, Christine Elliott wins the PC leadership next year, I will claim the trifecta, and admit quietly that nobody, including your humble servant, thought a Liberal majority was on the cards.

We now move to my major crow moment.

After noting, quite correctly it turned out, that "at the local level, we will see this fall the departure of some high profile faces from the council horseshoe and the return of a much-loved face," I completely blew it by predicting Cam Guthrie would not beat incumbent Karen Farbridge for the mayor's seat.

And while I did qualify that with "absent any great scandals in the coming months", given the margin, I am not sure Urbacon was the sole reason. I just got that wrong.

All the major political focus this year, I imagine, will be on the federal scene.

It seems unlikely that the prime minister will call a snap election now. He has had a good few weeks, and while we all gorge on festive excess, the memory of the bumbling Julian Fantino and other scandals will become fainter.

But as those memories dim, so will those photographs of Harper showing statesmanship and remarkable humanity when the two soldiers were killed in this fall. This was the PM at his best, something we haven't seen for a while. For so long this year all we saw was his chippy, evasive and combative side.

But while he did well on that file, the ongoing debacle in the management of veterans' affairs, and the media attention it draws, is hurting him in the very sector he relies on for support. He simply has to let Fantino go. The trick will be to do it quietly and not to lose face.

Harper's judgment is now seriously in question. Fantino is seen as his personal choice, As was Patrick Brazeau. As was Pamela Wallin. As was Mike Duffy. (As was Nigel Wright, come to that.)

This spring is the start of Duffy's trial, which will likely include questions about the PM's involvement in the Senate scandal cover-up. But the disgraced senator is not in good health and that throws some uncertainty over whether the trial ever happens.

But even if it doesn't, if Michael Sona's appeal comes to court, we'll have a re-run of the robocalls affair, at a time when most of us were starting to forget the sleazy politics practised by the Tories, federally and locally, in past elections.

To add to his troubles, the ongoing slide of oil prices is not just hitting the PM hard in the lack of tax revenue, it is also chipping away at the credibility of his resource-based economic policies.

This should all be good news for the Liberals and NDP. But if they cannot find a speedy resolution to these improper conduct allegations then that's where the headlines will be. Stephen Harper, delighted to be totally detached, at last, from a major scandal, will start to look good again if he can keep the economy afloat.

Until the next scandal.

(Ben Bennett's past columns can be found at www.bbc.guelph.org.)