

It's time to start paying attention, but not to the nonsense.

More to the Story

By Ben Bennett

So the phoney war phase of the local federal election campaign is over and we can now start paying attention.

If you were away, or had more important things to do and missed the first four weeks, you didn't miss much in Guelph. The blue signs went up on Day One, the red, orange and green signs started going up last weekend.

The door-to-door stuff has been happening, of course (so much of it, it seems, that some candidates don't have time to talk to the press).

One thing you did miss, and I really hoped we wouldn't be getting into this nonsense again, was the kind of unpleasantness that marred the 2011 election campaign.

Some trolls dug up what they perceived to be dirt on one of our local candidates and all of a sudden he became a target for the shady politics division. The "dirt" was a social media posting from several years ago that was a reaction to something George W. Bush had done or said, and it had absolutely nothing to do with anything in Guelph in 2015.

But it was enough for the muck-rakers to turn it into some kind of attack on religion and the outrage machine locally kicked into action, with letters from one failed federal candidate and a few other loyal soldiers.

The failed federal candidate is no stranger to the letters pages. It is no small wonder to my mind, however, that after an endless litany of vitriol against our current MP, he managed to evoke fire and brimstone in letters to both papers and didn't mention Mr. Valeriote's name in either. The target has gone from red to orange.

It is rather ironic that there has been an ongoing difficulty getting current candidates from one party across the country to speak about anything, while here in Guelph the ongoing difficulty is getting a past candidate to put a sock in it. I cannot believe this is helping the cause.

It has been a rough few weeks, let's face it. But the media moved on as the Duffy trial recessed. The awkward questions about who knew what and when have gone, but I

wonder if those uneasy feelings about the whole working ethos at the Prime Minister's Office are still lingering within the collective bosom of the party faithful.

Even if Stephen Harper knew nothing about the Duffy deal, the speed, enthusiasm and single-mindedness with which his staff conspired to lie to the country is surely the most disturbing finding of all. He hired those guys. Many of them are still there. And no one seems to have lost any sleep. Where is the moral outrage?

With the campaign focus now on the economy, Justin Trudeau has taken a bold and calculated move to separate himself from his rivals by committing to more public infrastructure spending, and fully acknowledging it means more deficits. With rock-bottom interest rates, this is actually a good time to make those investments, according to the financial commentators.

Predictably, he was immediately derided by the prime minister, a man who hasn't balanced a budget yet (OK, maybe one but only through creative book-keeping and even then it's not certain), and knows more about deficits than any other politician since... Brian Mulroney. Another great fiscal manager, Mike Harris, had to sell the 407 at a fire sale price to balance his books.

Thomas Mulcair is looking more like a prime minister-in-waiting every day but may have peaked too early. He has promised to balance the budget. It is not clear how he will do that but as the current front runner it was the right thing to say.

At some point, whoever has the reins, the prickly issue of revenue will raise its head and there will have to be an increase in taxes. While there are clearly people at the upper end of the scale who can afford to pay more, it will not be easy to recover the billions of dollars of income we lost when the GST was lowered to five per cent.

The government, whether it is a majority or a minority, will need a lot of courage to address the revenue question head on, but it should be done and it should be done early.

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