

# Co-operation by local provincial candidates on water issues is refreshing

*More to the Story*

By Ben Bennett

It has become the norm nowadays for movie-makers to have a number of different endings to their stories. Imagine being the script-writer who has to tell the tale of this week's by-elections in Niagara and Thornhill.

Any number of endings to this drama could be unfolding.

And of course, it doesn't hurt that Friday is Valentine's Day when Liberal premier Kathleen Wynne, NDP Leader Andrea Horwath and PC Leader Tim Hudak get to reflect on how much they are loved.

Let's look at the plot lines and how they affect the script for the next movie. But first, we need to set the scene.

Thornhill is a PC seat held by Peter Shurman, who decided not to run for re-election after a little spot of bother about an inappropriately claimed housing allowance. He won by about six percentage points over the Liberals in 2011, with the NDP a distant third.

Notwithstanding the scandal, which was quickly dealt with by Mr. Hudak, the latest polls suggest the Tories will hold the seat. If by some miracle the Liberals win, it will be seen as a major blow to the PCs, and to Mr. Hudak.

Niagara Falls is Tim Hudak's backyard, but the seat was won in 2011 by a Liberal, Kim Craitor, in a neck-and-neck contest with the Tory candidate. The NDP was a respectable third with 26% of the vote.

This time, the polls suggest the contest is between the Tories and the NDP, with the Liberals a long way back. Given Mr. Hudak's recent predilection for bashing "the union bosses", the odds are likely that the NDP has the momentum to take this working class town.

Script One, therefore, has Kathleen Wynne saddened, but deep down, likely not very surprised. She takes some comfort in the strong-ish Liberal showing in Thornhill, but now knows for sure she is headed for the polls this May.

The camera moves to Ms Horwath, buoyed by her success in Niagara and now determined to bring down the Liberals in the spring budget so she can keep the bandwagon rolling.

Following a night of mixed emotions for Mr. Hudak, winning one he expected to win but failing to win yet another available Liberal seat, he is really no further ahead. He recognizes his much-publicized wish for a provincial election looks more likely now, however, and quietly wonders how much momentum Ms Horwath actually has. Can the NDP poach enough Liberal votes to allow him a minority government?

Either way, his resignation speech, prepared in the event of a loss in Thornhill, goes back in the drawer for another day.

The second version of the story sees PC wins in both seats, a huge smile on Mr. Hudak's face and a shrug from Ms Horwath, who then decides to prop up the Liberals a little longer. Ms Wynne notes the irony, then she too, shrugs.

Scenario Three, briefly considered by the producers but soon discarded, has Liberal wins in both seats and all talk of a May election drifting away with the tide.

Meanwhile, in Guelph, with a May election looking very likely (assuming the first script plays out), here's a good news story. The three main rivals to Liberal Liz Sandal's seat showed this week they are out, about and engaged, but not in a partisan way.

With an unusual showing of solidarity over the Dolime quarry issue, the NDP's James Gordon, Mike Schreiner of the Greens and PC candidate Anthony MacDonald all stood together Tuesday at an event at Guelph City Hall. The three signed a letter urging the Province to respond to the City's appeal of the MOE's decision to allow drilling that many see as jeopardizing Guelph's major aquifer. To her credit, Ms Sandal also showed up to stand with them, even though her role as Minister of the Crown constrained her from any further rabble-rousing.

If this week's by-elections do increase the odds of a spring full election, we can look forward a decision on that appeal any time.

And given all the nonsense we see at the higher levels of politics, such local co-operation is refreshing. Let's hope our water can stay that way, too.

(Ben Bennett's past columns can be found at [www.bbc.guelph.org](http://www.bbc.guelph.org).)