

# In politics, there's no stopping the awesome power of the tide

*More to the Story*

By Ben Bennett

**Democracy is the worst form of government, except for all the others. Winston Churchill is credited as being the guy that said this and he did have reason to be bitter. He brought Britain through the darkest days of the Second World War and the first chance the electorate had to say thank you, they threw him out on his ear.**

**In the mid-2000s, after inheriting a huge deficit from the Tories, and bringing the country back from the economic brink as finance minister, Paul Martin continued as prime minister to record healthy surpluses. But with the separation genie more or less back in the bottle, it was a corruption scandal in Quebec that brought down his government. We have had the pleasure of Stephen Harper's leadership ever since. And deficits every year.**

**To be fair, there was a global recession in 2008 but that was a long time ago now and it was Mr. Martin's famous "fundamentals" that ensured we were well-braced to withstand it. If the price of oil doesn't completely slide into the toilet in the coming months, the revenues from the tar sands may lead to a small surplus in time for next year's federal election, but Mr. Harper has already spent most of that on tax breaks for the wealthy.**

**South of the border, Barack Obama was swept into power on the promise of real social change and progressive government. Then he got hit by the same recession (much harder given that's where it started – thanks, George), and then faced huge Republican intransigence and stonewalling every time he tried to do something. Most of the stuff that could have happened, didn't, and now, likely won't.**

**Earlier this month, that understanding and compassionate audience that had voted for Obama before did what Americans always do halfway through the term; they kicked him the rear end and his agenda is effectively toast for the balance of this term.**

**And here, after steering us through the local impacts of the recession locally, scoring major provincial and federal dollars for much-needed infrastructure work in the city, and still keeping tax increases lower than the previous administration, Mayor Karen Farbridge has been tossed to the curb in favour of the populist Cam Guthrie.**

**What all these unlikely electoral losers have in common is that the voters decided they had overstayed their welcome. Was it fair? Maybe not, but this is the system we have and like it or not, once the tide turns, the resulting wave will not be stopped. Despite our cynicism about that system, the power of those voters is truly awesome.**

**The additional irony here is that great efforts were made this time to get more folks to vote – ads, online voting etc.- and a lot more did vote. But they all, in effect, voted for Mr. Guthrie. The Farbridge vote was within a few hundred of the 2010 election, but she still lost.**

**Either way, the margin of victory was such that you really cannot point to one thing as being a game changer. Clearly, the electorate decided it was time for a change.**

**(By any measure, the provincial Liberals should have had the same treatment this past summer, with their overstayed welcome and a host of scandals. It is a perverse tribute to how badly the Tories managed their campaign that they not only didn't win, but gave the Liberals a majority, to boot. The PCs will, however, win in 2018 with Christine Elliott leading a more moderate party.)**

**It should be noted that, on the whole, Mr. Guthrie campaigned on a centrist platform rather than a conservative one, despite the efforts of others to paint him as hard right.**

**With a well-balanced council to work with, he now has a chance to put that centrist philosophy into practice.**

**Despite all the nonsense, ugliness and bad feeling that came to the surface during the recent campaign, I don't see this as the sea change of power that we saw in 2003. Or, some may argue, in 2006.**

**The fall-out from the global economic downturn is mostly past, the local fundamentals are in place and growth is happening all over the place.**

**Whichever side of the fence you may occupy politically, it ain't a bad place for a new council to start.**

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