

## **Partisanship Should Play Second Fiddle to Needs of NBers**

The timing of the Prime Minister's May 23 election call may have been the worst-kept secret in the history of politics. Nevertheless, for the first time in a long time it has generated considerable buzz around the water cooler.

Rightly so.

At last, we seem to be in the run-up to a federal election the outcome of which actually means something to us. Something more, that is, than merely a constitutionally-mandated periodic change to the seating arrangements in a House of Commons which, generally speaking, for years has offered us only more of the same.

Health care and education, of course – particularly university education – are among the election issues foremost in everyone's mind.

Our aging population and technical innovations, among other things, are constantly driving up the cost of health care delivery - by up to nine per cent per year, according to former New Brunswick Health Minister Dr. Denis Furlong.

Even though university graduates enjoy virtually full employment and pay more in taxes than all other Canadians combined, and even though 70 per cent of all new jobs created in Canada last year required some type of formal post secondary graduation, the average tuition fee increases in this province's universities this year, at more than six per cent, are the second-highest in the country.

These are visceral issues for most thinking voters. Therefore, most New Brunswickers will, no doubt, be voting for the party which they believe to be not only the most willing, but also the most likely to ensure that enough federal tax dollars continue to be put into these particular transfer-payment envelopes to meet our escalating needs in those areas.

In every federal election in living memory, each political party has spouted the "this-election-is-about-the-kind-of-Canada-we-want" mantra in order to secure our votes.

This time, though, it really is so.

We have the Prime Minister saying we are not going to be like the Americans. Our federal tax dollars, he says, will be spent on health care, education, and the other social programs which make us Canadian.

New Conservative party leader Stephen Harper, on the other hand, promises to limit government intervention in our lives, and to reduce our taxes to levels lower than those paid by the citizens of the United States.

As a result, despite the fervent hopes of many New Democratic Party voters – whose numbers, by the way, are disproportionately larger than the number of seats their party occupies in the House – that the NDP will not continue in its traditional also-ran status in the forthcoming electoral sweepstakes, it appears that the Liberals' "steady hand at the helm" and the New Conservatives' "it's time for a radical change" messages have made these latter two parties the major protagonists in the forthcoming battle of the ballots.

For such high-profile M.P.'s as Scott Brison and John Herron to cross over to the Liberals just before an election is not unprecedented.

We'd give odds, though, that no such former Prime Minister and respected elder statesman as Joe Clark has ever quit his party with defecting colleagues, has actively campaigned for them to be re-elected as the candidates of the major opposing party, or has said publicly that he would vote for his lifelong opponents on the grounds that his successor is "dangerous".

For once, there's going to be an election where the passions and the stakes are high. There are indications that it could get quite nasty, and the winners could be as much the survivors as the victors.

Nevertheless, this election should not be decided on the basis of blind partisanship, but on that of the ability to deliver what Canadians need.