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0 MON OCTOBER 3, 2011

VOTERS ARE TIRED OF ON MESSAGE CANDIDATES

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BY ANDREW RAMPERSAUD | BLOGGER
Journalist, Parkdale-High Park



On a recent Saturday jaunt through my riding, I met a fellow Parkdalian at Queen St. W. and Beaty Ave. named Mars Black.

A home truth about elections: It's supposed to be the voters who decide what the issues are. So I asked Black what he thought of this one.

"It seems to be more about party politics than people politics per se," said the 38-year-old entrepreneur who also works in sales. "It seems like it's just about jockeying for positions than trying to address the concerns of the community."

Black is an occasional voter who feels elections have become a process where "you just go through the motions."

He says he'd be less nonchalant about going to the polls if the local politicians and their volunteers weren't so aloof.

"It's funny, because I only see them around at election time. I've never seen them doing the day-to-day business of politics," he said.

"A lady gave me a flyer and she didn't even look at me when she gave me the flyer. She was like, 'Here' and I was like, 'Alright, thanks.' And I thought, 'You probably want to get to know me? Try to get to know me. Just try.'"

As *Toronto Star* editorial columnist [Carol Goar](#) wrote a week after the writ dropped, the provincial campaign we've seen is not about the voters. It's a partisan war of attrition where hastily put together platforms are propped up by a tinpot navy of candidates who, in lieu of straight answers, offer the electorate canned lines.

A sampling of the bumper-sticker slogans used by the frontrunners in Parkdale-High Park: the NDP's Cheri DiNovo used the closer "As Jack Layton said, 'Don't let them tell you it can't be done'" in her taglines at two all-candidates forums. And just like the other NDP hopefuls, she makes sure to sneak in "eliminate corporate tax breaks" at least a few times in conversation.

If only I could get a tax break every time I heard that line this campaign.

Conversely, the Liberal's Cortney Pasternak is an echo of Dalton McGuinty. It's her first time running, so the only record she has to lean on is his. To avoid looking completely like a puppet though, her people came up with a cringe-worthy missive for her to say ad nauseam: "There's always more work to do."

Beyond the Rack

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In other words, "Forward. Together."

What party strategists failed to realize during their nightly [focus groups](#) this election is that turning their candidates into mouthpieces makes it harder for voters to pick them. For the electorate, casting a ballot now means figuring out if you can live with just a platform.

"I just like to see how people address their area and get a sense of their personality," says Tasia Swaluk, 26, a Bloor West Village resident I met at the corner of Jane St. and Annette St. earlier that Saturday. "I think that's kind of the important part. I vote based on who I think is more relatable and who relates to myself."

She usually votes by party, but laments, "This time I'm not so sure though just because I don't think there's anyone that stands out for me."

Parkdale-High Park's candidates are pandering to constituents, albeit awkwardly. Hoping to reign in the riding's Tibetan vote, DiNovo is pictured with the Dalai Lama in a recently released [campaign flyer](#). In a [YouTube video](#) where Pasternak talks to local businesses in High Park, she wanders into a clothing store and instead of canvassing, starts shopping. "I know I should be working but I just can't help myself," she sheepishly admits.

To address the 2007 provincial election's record-setting low of 52.8 per cent voter turnout, [Elections Ontario](#) stretched this campaign to 29 days and gave Ontarians the option to cast their ballot in person or by mail. They even made the advance polls run 10 days and introduced, for the first time, assistive voting technology all because they think the whole thing might just be too hard.

Making voting easier, however, does nothing to dispel electoral pet peeves.

Says Black: "I find most of the candidates don't speak about anything that relates to me."

Whether it's about the issues, the Leaders or the voting process, Speak Your Mind to get the conversation started.



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