



## **Ontario Campaign Week Two: Campaigns Positioning for the Coming Air War**

This week, the strategy of each campaign began to take shape. All three parties have used their policy proposals, and their reactions to their opponents' positions, to position themselves for the election. On June 13<sup>th</sup>, it will be these strategic decisions – and the major assumptions that underpin them – that political observers will be discussing while they hail the victor and disparage the unsuccessful campaigns.

### **Ontario PC Party**

The Progressive Conservatives have put forth provocative, conservative priorities focused on job creation, deficit reduction and government reform. (We have developed a “Quick Reference Guide” to the platform that can be found [here](#).) The “Million Jobs Plan” will be music to the ears of their base voters and, if the PCs win a majority on June 12<sup>th</sup>, PC Leader Tim Hudak would be able to claim a mandate for broad reform. With his platform, Hudak is not only attempting to energize his base with policies like the 100,000 cut in public sector jobs, but also to appeal to swing voters by positioning himself as the only leader who will tell Ontarians the truth, and that strong medicine is needed to get the province back on track.

### **Ontario Liberal Party**

As we noted last week – even though the 2014 Budget was clearly designed to appeal to voters inclined toward the New Democrats – the Liberals have more recently been focused on contrasting themselves with the PCs, and the PC platform has only helped this effort. Surprisingly, Premier Kathleen Wynne has probably spent more time decrying Hudak's platform than she has promoting ideas from her proposed budget. Although traditional political wisdom is that, when you are speaking about your opponent's priorities, you are probably losing, in this case the PC platform may well be the most effective tool available to rally potential Liberal voters in the election. At some point the Liberals will need to provide more positive reasons for voters to choose them by getting back to the policies in their budget, but for now the PC platform is clearly setting the tone for the overall policy discussion.

### **Ontario NDP**

As part of a novel approach to expanding her traditional base, NDP Leader Andrea Horwath has continued to pursue her populist agenda. She has focused her policy announcements on pocketbook issues, such as removing HST from residential electricity bills, eliminating government waste and, most surprisingly, with a promised creation of a Minister of Savings and Accountability to lead the charge. Although she may risk alienating voters who should be part of her core, as long as her message penetrates, it may well provide dividends with centre-left voters who are disaffected by Liberal scandals.



### **Gaffes Continue**

Each of the parties continues to face operational challenges. From Hudak's aborted subway ride, to Horwath's teleprompter dependency, to the Liberal candidates' social media fiascos, each party has provided fodder to the media that has served as a painful distraction from planned key message events.

### **The Air War Begins**

While stage-managed media events engineered to drive news headlines have characterized the first two weeks of the campaign, that all changes May 20<sup>th</sup> when parties begin saturating Ontario screens with ads.

From the PCs we can expect to see a focus on tying Wynne to former Premier Dalton McGuinty and the scandals that plagued his last days in office, including the cancelled gas plants. Undoubtedly, positive ads will also feature their Million Jobs Plan.

It will be interesting to see how much the Liberals use TV advertising to continue to focus on contrasting themselves with the PCs, and whether they instead turn their focus on the NDP. The Liberals will likely run a combination of ads citing the "dangerous" PC policies as well as versions featuring Wynne talking about priorities like their proposed Ontario Pension Plan.

The NDP's ad strategy isn't entirely clear but it's safe to assume that, with her high personal approval numbers, Horwath herself will feature prominently. Given the New Democrats pulled their support for the Liberals based on the premise that "we can't trust these guys," their sights may be planted on the Liberals. That may change if the NDP feel they are losing support to the PCs.

The ad battle will continue to be supported by each party employing social media to share their messages in targeted ways to reach influencers, such as journalists and party activists, with the objective of using those individuals to amplify the message to wider audiences in Ontario.

A recent Ipsos Reid analysis of Twitter discussion showed that no party was winning the tweeting war on the early election battle ground. The last Ontario election in 2011, coined the Twitter election, failed to materialize as expected so it will be interesting to monitor how much social media impacts candidates and campaigns in 2014.

For more information please contact us at 416-864-7112 or 613-231-2630.