

forum

■ COLUMN: 'It is the people's government and the people have the final say'

Elections provide the public with a voice

The start of 2011 marked my fifth year as the serving Member of Parliament for Barrie. After five years in a minority government, I had become used to the 'tone' of Parliament. There was always the threat that the next election was just around the corner.



Patrick Brown
PARLIAMENT HILL

make sure some additional funds for Barrie's new Downtown Community Theatre would be delivered regardless of the election outcome, and I pushed to ensure the \$100 million pledged for neurological research would be honoured.

Making progress on legislation and new initiatives had always required a great deal of patience and hard work from MPs, and there certainly was some progress made, but it was becoming more difficult to reach a consensus and many of the bills before the House began to languish in committee.

It was a surreal moment seeing the government defeated by the opposition parties as they tossed paper in the air from their side of the aisles. It was a strange display to say the least, and I felt saddened that months of political bickering had come to this. After the vote I rushed back to Barrie to meet with my campaign team.

These important forums to discuss what mattered to Canadians were becoming less about people's business and more about the business of partisan posturing. As we entered the month of March, the level of intensity increased exponentially.

Together with my campaign chair and campaign manager, we set the ambitious goals of knocking on all 51,000 households in Barrie and securing more than 5,000 sign locations. Neither of these benchmarks had been accomplished in Barrie before. We would also be active in utilizing social media like Facebook and Twitter.

In the weeks leading up to the budget, our caucus was hopeful that there were enough measures in the budget to address what the opposition parties had been asking for and I was personally happy to see a number of commitments which I had lobbied for were included in the plan.

In the first week of the campaign, I had a visit from my friend and colleague Peter MacKay. Peter has served Canada with distinction as our defence minister and his visit to help us open up the campaign office was a real treat for our campaign 'troops'.

The week before the budget, I was participating at Red Bull's Crashed Ice race in Quebec City in support of multiple sclerosis (MS) with fellow MPs, including the New Democratic Party's Glenn Thibeault (MP from Sudbury). Glenn and I spoke at length about the possibility of an election call. Neither of us thought it would actually happen and I was surprised when it did.

Campaigns involve hundreds of people who graciously volunteer their time, make donations and help to get the word out.

Once it became evident an election was upon us, I scrambled in those last few days to

Below-zero temperatures greeted our canvassing teams in the opening days of the campaign and it made door-knock-



MARK WANZEL Photo

Barrie voters head to the polls to cast their votes in the federal election held May 2.

ing a challenge. Ten hours of door-knocking leaves your fingers with little feeling, but our very effective and dedicated canvass team inspired me to work even harder. There were many days during the campaign when driving rain and wind made even walking down the street difficult, but every single day was needed in order to reach every door in Barrie and our devoted team pressed on.

I tried to work every day from 7 a.m. to midnight. I would visit senior residences in the morning, door-knock throughout the day and return e-mails and phone calls at night.

The first time I ran for MP in 2004, I felt that the folks at the senior residences may have been a little sceptical of this 25-year-old kid wanting to be their MP.

raise for them as well.

This time around, I felt a very warm reception. I had worked very hard to get government grants for local senior homes and hosted a number of events throughout my term to fund-

For me, one of the lighter moments of the campaign comes from the story behind the 'campaign bus'. One of my grandfather's oldest and dearest friends approached me during the election and offered to put our campaign logos on his personal, full-sized bus.

In the past, he had used his classic bus to take a delegation of citizens to Ottawa to advocate for MS awareness amongst other philanthropic outings for local groups. He offered to park it at his place of business on Bradford Street and move it around Barrie from time to time. It was quite a sight to see this huge bus travel around the city, but the truth is it was basically just an inexpensive form of advertising for the campaign.

Members of the Filipino, Pakistani, Indian and Indo-Canadian community in Barrie were a great help to our campaign. In spite of many of these individuals being very busy managing

their own business or holding down two jobs, they worked tirelessly to deliver literature, put signs together or knock on doors. The Saturday of the Easter long weekend, we had great weather and eight canvass teams to knock on doors all day long. We had over 50 door-knockers out on the ground that day and we covered more than 10% of the riding in a single day.

During the last weekend of the campaign with time being of the essence, one of our volunteers took charge of a team of roller bladers to deliver our 'get out to vote cards'. It was a pretty novel idea.

On that note, if there was one thing I missed during the campaign was playing and watching hockey. Hockey is one of my passions. I was so busy during the campaign that I was not aware of how the NHL teams were doing in their playoff series.

Campaigns cannot be run without proper finances. I am

immensely appreciative of so many business leaders, professionals and just plain hard-working folks who generously donated to the campaign. They are tremendously patriotic residents and I am honoured to have friends like them.

Campaigns are an unusual experience to describe and difficult at times. I remember discussing campaigns with one of my volunteers and we laughed at how horrendous our eating habits become during campaigns. Election days are always nerve-racking. You never know what might happen. I was very touched when I walked into the Bank Lounge that evening. It was such an honour to celebrate the victory with so many of our dedicated volunteers and a humbling experience to serve Barrie for a third term.

I know elections are always a stressful time in particular for members of my immediate family and I was definitely relieved that they do not have to worry about another campaign for the foreseeable future.

Obviously, I was ecstatic with the results on election night, humbled by the confidence that Barrie continues to show me, extremely thankful for all the hard work of so many and eager to get back to work on behalf of my constituents.

The rewards of an election campaign are immeasurable. The personal contact with voters is so important to an elected representative. Elections are the perfect opportunity to have your voice heard and Election 2011 was no exception.

After all, it is the people's government and the people have the final say. And that is the way it should be.

Thank you Barrie.

Patrick Brown is Barrie's MP

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