

New federal wild card: Dalton

Posted By CHRISTINA BLIZZARD, [SUN MEDIA](#) October 20 2008

Posted 5 hours ago

It's been a long, uncomfortable election campaign. A jittery roller-coaster that's left our wallets battered and our stomachs queasy.

Voters in this province helped themselves to a hefty portion of comfort food last Tuesday, to help settle their nerves.

They opted for the status quo, with a tweak or two here and there, just to let us know there's been an election.

The biggest loser was Stéphane Dion and his Liberals. No matter what he did, he just couldn't connect with voters in this province.

Worse, he made the biggest mistake any politician can fall into. He allowed his opponents to define him. Right off the bat, the Tories labelled him as "not worth the risk."

His controversial carbon tax was branded as "a tax on everything." Dion clearly misread the tea leaves. First, the election wasn't about the environment. It was about the economy. Sure, times change, but the writing was on the wall in the manufacturing sector long before the election was called.

Then again, you have to wonder at the Tory strategy as well.

Conservative Leader Stephen Harper no doubt had high hopes of wooing support from the Bloc Québécois in Quebec.

That way they wouldn't need Ontario.

Except if you're going to put all your eggs in one basket, don't hand it over to Humpty Dumpty for safekeeping.

Why would you deliberately alienate the province that has one third of seats?

Finance Minister Jim Flaherty's characterization of this province as the "worst place to invest," dogged the Conservatives on the hustings.

I'm betting he won't be back as finance minister in Harper's new cabinet.

Finally, Harper's unnecessarily cruel mocking of cultural funding, showed a shocking lack of understanding of the electorate.

Dion was the biggest loser in this province. And while the Conservatives picked up new seats you can't help thinking another big winner was Jack Layton and the NDP.

The biggest shift was in the North, where four ridings shifted from red to orange.

Longtime Algoma-Manitoulin- Kapuskasing Liberal incumbent Brent St. Denis was defeated by New Democrat Carol Hughes.

Nickel Belt tilted left also. With no incumbent, New Democrat Claude Gravelle defeated Liberal Louise Portelance.

The economy in Northwestern Ontario is struggling as the forestry and the pulp and paper industry have been in freefall. That made the region fertile ground for change.

The two Thunder Bay ridings were hotly contested. The NDP went on to victory in both those massive ridings. John Rafferty pulled off an upset win in Thunder Bay-Rainy River against Liberal incumbent Ken Boshcoff. This was a rematch of 2006, when Boshcoff narrowly edged Rafferty.

Bruce Hyer also won the seat in Thunder Bay Superior North, a seat left vacant when Liberal-turned-Tory Joe Comuzzi retired.

Kenora went Conservative, electing a young lawyer, Greg Rickford.

With massive job losses during the election campaign and the announced closure of the John Deere plant, the economy was also on the mind of voters in Welland. They tossed incumbent John Maloney in favour of CAW executive New Democrat Malcolm Allen.

Voters forgave Health Minister Tony Clement for his foray into the U. S. National Democratic Convention in Denver at the height of the listeriosis outbreak. He cruised to victory over Liberal opponent, local councillor Jamie McGarvey in Parry Sound-Muskoka.

All around the province, Conservative incumbents had little problem getting their jobs back.

Dion's lacklustre showing makes one thing certain: The leadership campaign to replace him starts today.

And the wild card in all of that? Well, try Premier Dalton McGuinty. You think that's far-fetched? Well, he's the only Liberal around who doesn't have baggage. He can pull the party together quickly and get this province on-side.

Sure, it's never happened before. A premier of this province has never gone on to become prime minister. But there's a first time for everything, and you have to think the pressure is on McGuinty at this point. He's an Ottawa boy, and Prime Minister McGuinty must have an awful nice ring to him.

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Article ID# 1255334