

Spending has little to do with results

There's an old saying attributed to the Danish fur trappers who first began settling Greenland in the 1620s that, "The next mile is the only one a person really has to make."

For U.S. Democratic Senator Hillary Clinton, that "next mile," i.e. defeating Senator Barack Obama in the increasingly bitter Democratic primary, isn't an easy task. But there's no questioning Clinton's tenacity in seeking to cover the distance.

While the Clinton-Obama race is clearly helping Republican Senator John McCain's chances in the fall general election, and is almost mesmerizing for those of us who, alas, are political junkies, Clinton's recent 10-point win in the Pennsylvania primary also serves as a rebuke to those in this country who seem to believe that, everything else aside, good old fashioned money can buy you an election victory.

This issue is particularly relevant given the scurrilous actions of Elections Canada in recruiting the RCMP - and tipping off the media and the Liberals - to raid the federal Tory headquarters - wearing flak jackets, as if the Tories were somehow going to fire guns at them - on a questionable premise regarding the technical workings of Canada's absurd election spending laws.

Ever since his days as head of the National Citizens Coalition, Stephen Harper has been a harsh critic of Elections Canada's approach to election spending practices in this country.

The Tories and Elections Canada are currently in a court battle, yet Elections Canada chose to use their power to send in the cops who, in turn, seized everything they could see, whether it had anything to do with the alleged overspending - of \$1million over the allowable \$8 million on advertising - in the last election by the Tories.

The Tories claim they did nothing wrong. Elections Canada says they did. Time will tell. But the point here, getting back to Clinton and Pennsylvania, is that the predictable - and downright dumb - claims by both the Liberals and NDP that the relatively small Tory excess, even if the charges against them are true, completely altered the outcome of the election. Indeed, several senior Liberals brazenly claimed that without this Tory spending, they would have won the election, not the Tories.

Oh please. In 1992, during the referendum on the Charlottetown Accord, the "yes" side outspent the "no" side by a margin of roughly 21 to one, yet the "no" side easily won the day.

In Pennsylvania, Obama spent \$8.1 million advertising himself, compared to Clinton's \$3.2 million, yet Clinton won by about 10 percentage points. It is this mistaken belief in this country of the direct link between advertising dollars spent and number of votes tallied which led to the outrageous and profoundly undemocratic "gag laws," a set of laws which impose antediluvian restrictions on how much money either private citizens or groups can spend on "election advertising."

The laws are so restrictive that any person and/or group not an official political party is virtually shut out of the political advertising arena for fear that some rich person or wealthy group could "buy" the election on behalf of their favorite party and/or issue.

It's total nonsense, not backed up by any empirical evidence or research, a law that Prime Minister Harper, in his previous aforementioned job with the NCC, fought continually to have tossed out.

The law is based on the premise that voters are so gullible - stupid even - that watching an election ad during their favorite TV soap opera is going to convince them to rush right out and vote for the party running the ad. Not bloody likely.

Yes, money does help. Getting your message to more people isn't a bad thing. It's just not the sort of thing government bureaucrats should have any business controlling.

Harper used to rail against it. But, as further evidence that out-of-power views often change dramatically when people get into power, Harper has done nothing to act on his promise to get rid of these undemocratic "gag laws."

Harper is right in suggesting that Elections Canada is using its power as a grudge match against his earlier criticisms, and we can only hope that if he garners a majority in the next election - and given the weak Liberal leadership that's a real possibility - he'll not only get Elections Canada out of the business of telling political parties where they should spend their advertising dollars, but he'll nuke those dreadful gag laws" and restore free speech to those Canadians who care enough about the political process to exercise it, whether they are on the right, the left, the middle or somewhere in cyberspace.



National Affairs

Claire Hoy

Any of us could be wrongly accused

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was who killed Lynne Harper in 1959, then watched Truscott take the rap.

The fact that the wrong person can be convicted is one of my main arguments against capital punishment, and to my mind, it's an unanswerable one. How is the system supposed to apologize to the grave of a person who has been wrongfully put to death? A human life should not be the subject of a judicial translation of "Oops!"

Now I know this reads a bit like I'm knocking our judicial system, and I guess to an extent, I am. But as I've stated in this forum many times in the past, I realize there are few better systems practised in the

world for dealing with criminals. But it is a fact that there is plenty of room for improvement, and we received another clear lesson in that reality last week; a lesson to go with all the others we've received over the years. Too many innocent people are being sent away for too many years, and in some cases, they are being put away for life.

Even if we don't have capital punishment any more (it's refreshing that the calls for its restoration don't seem as common as they were a couple of years ago), the fact that innocent people can go to prison in our society is something that should concern us all.

Like I stated before, that trial many years ago still troubles me. I will probably never know for sure if the

man rightly or wrongly convicted, but I will always have some doubt. There have been several job changes for me since then, and I have lost track of the issue. I don't know what eventually happened to the man who was sent to prison, or even if he's still alive. There were people at the time who criticized and even ridiculed me for voicing my concerns over the matter.

There is a poem, known as *First They Came*, which is attributed to a Pastor Martin Niemoller, and it deals with the way intellectuals reacted (or failed to react) to the early days of the Nazi regime in Germany, rationalizing one didn't have to speak out when they came after the communists if one was not a communist, and it was the same when the

authorities went after the social democrats, trade unionists and finally the Jews.

"When they came for me," the poem concludes, "there was no one left to speak out."

Am I going a bit over the top with this reference? Perhaps. But you or I could be the next person facing the system for a murder we did not commit, and waiting for someone to speak out on our behalf.

You could argue it would never happen. I wonder if such thoughts ever entered Baltovich's mind in the years before his ordeal started.

The truth is if it could happen to a Baltovich or a Truscott, it could happen to any of us.

All we have to be is innocent.

Summing up the North American Leaders' Summit

Last week, Prime Minister Harper participated in the North American Leaders' Summit in New Orleans.

This annual summit provides three neighbouring countries: Canada, the United States and Mexico, an opportunity to discuss how they can continue to work together on issues of mutual importance. This year's summit was particularly productive, as Prime Minister Harper reaffirmed Canada's focus on several key areas.

One of the key areas upon which the three countries agreed to a renewed focus was increasing the competitiveness of our businesses and economies. We will accomplish this by working to make our regulations more compatible, which will support integrated supply chains and reduce the cost of goods traded within North America. The auto industry is an example of this, as we are seeking to implement compatible fuel efficiency regimes and high safety standards to protect human health and the environment, as well as reducing the costs of producing cars and trucks for the North American market. We are also strengthening efforts to protect our inventors, authors, performers, and other innovators by advancing our Intellectual Property Action Strategy.

Border security was also an issue of importance and focus for all three countries. The leaders agreed that to make our borders smarter and more secure, we are coordinating our long-term infrastructure plans and are taking steps to enhance and

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reduce bottlenecks and congestion at major border crossings. The three countries are working together to co-ordinate the efforts of federal agencies to enhance capacity at major border crossing points, such as Detroit-Windsor and San Diego-Tijuana. We are deepening co-operation on the development and application of technology to make our border both smarter and more secure, as well as strengthening trusted traveler and shipper customs procedures. Furthermore, we are looking at new customs procedures, such as a more uniform filing procedure with the aim of reducing transactional costs, while enhancing the security of our borders.

We renewed our efforts and focus on strengthening energy security and protecting the environment. In order to do this, we are attempting to develop a framework for harmonization of energy efficiency standards and sharing technical information to improve the North American energy market. Our countries intend to work together to: create an outlook for biofuels for the region, enhance our electricity networks, and make more efficient use of our energy by increasing fuel efficiency of our vehicles. There was also a commitment towards reducing the

barriers to expanding clean energy technologies.

All three countries agreed on a renewed focus to improve our citizens' access to safe food, as well as health and consumer products in North America. We are addressing this issue by working to strengthen our respective regulatory and inspection systems to protect consumers, while maintaining the efficient flow of food and products among the three countries. We are also working to make our food and product safety standards more compatible and to improve continental recall capacities, while working with the private sector to ensure our efforts are complementary.

Finally, a renewed focus to improve our response to emergencies was also discussed during the summit. We are updating our bilateral agreements to enable our local, state, provincial, and federal authorities to help each other quickly and efficiently during times of crisis and great need, including responding to threats posed by cyber or chemical-biological attacks. In this respect, we've made marked progress in discussions for new bilateral emergency management agreements to help manage the movement of goods and people across the border during and after the emergency.

During the summit, our countries also reaffirmed our shared commitment to continue efforts to fight transnational threats that pose challenges to our countries and to the well-being of all citizens, such as: organized crime; trafficking of arms, people, and drugs; smuggling; terrorism; money laundering; counterfeiting; and border violence.

The North American Leaders' Summit addressed many of the most significant issues that Canada, the United States and Mexico are all facing today. We recognize that working together on these issues is key to overcoming them. Our government looks forward to working with these countries and our citizens to develop the most comprehensive and effective approaches in the coming months.

Conservative government provides long-term gas tax funding

We all know that infrastructure is essential to the development and long-term sustainability of our communities. Our government recognizes this need and is providing the necessary support needed by municipalities all across Canada to improve infrastructure. One of the ways we're providing this support is through the Gas Tax Fund.

The Gas Tax Fund helps to build communities by providing predictable funding in support of municipal infrastructure that enhances the environment and quality of life. Furthermore, it benefits communities by providing funding to increase the

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