

## All parties are a few planks short of an election platform

Nigel Hannaford Calgary Herald  
Saturday, September 13, 2008

When it comes to the Internet, I'm like John McCain, who famously doesn't do e-mail. If I could get somebody else to squint at the screen for me, I would.

You know, why have a dog and bark yourself?

As David Radler, my old boss and one-time friend of Conrad Black was wont to say, "Nobody with a computer on their desk ever made a dollar."

But, that was in 1998, when a steam-driven Mac Plus with a 20 MB external hard drive was hot, hot, hot.

This is 2008, and there's a whole generation of people who will spend two minutes looking up a phone number on their computer before they'll take five seconds to find it in a phone book.

That being so, don't you think political parties would put their platforms up on the web? Especially during an election?

I thought it was just my Radlerite search skills, but days into the campaign I could only find one party platform, that of the Greens, and that was from the 2006 election.

This, from a party that's supposed to be especially appealing to a hip, computer-literate younger generation? Beats me.

But frankly, it colours my thoughts on having Elizabeth May in the leaders' debate. I heard her speak in 2006; should I just dig out my old notes? Either that, or given the borderline incestuous relationship between the two parties, perhaps the Greens are waiting for the Liberals to announce their platform, then link to it. (For now, one looks in vain on the Liberal website for a 2008 Red Book. Videos, a few brief op-eds on leadership, the economy and the Green Shift, is about it.)

An e-mail from Green-central assures me, "Our information centre staff will work to ensure that a response is sent to you within 48 hours."

The Greens at least can say they don't have much money, and weren't ready.

What, however, is the Conservatives' excuse for their platform-lite?

Under policy, one will find The Speech from the Throne and the 2008 Budget. Strictly speaking, those two documents could be considered a manifesto and the cheque book that gives it flesh. However, speaking as one who has periodically to wade through this stuff trying to boil it down into something people will read, it's not exactly fodder for the undecided. Of the 14.9 million people who voted in 2006, not one in a thousand will read it.

The party website does identify what the campaign considers "Key Issues." Sovereignty, leadership, the environment, lower taxes and several others: all the usual Conservative suspects. Click on the links however, and one finds the information is labelled The Conservative Record, and is contrasted with the record of the last Liberal government. As for the future? More of the same, presumably.

Well, at least the Tories aren't out there making all sorts of promises. A party spokesman says a platform will be announced "at a later date."

Finally, the NDP's "Plan" is in much the same vein, but from the other side: Stephen Harper can't be trusted, Stephane Dion isn't the change we need, why bless my soul, that just leaves Jack Layton.

You can certainly get a feel for what the NDP is about. As a platform though, it's short a few planks. What about defence? Foreign affairs? Arctic sovereignty?

There are people who make this kind of thing their personal passion. One such is **Jeremy Hexham**, now an Athabasca MA student, and a political junkie of some years' standing. (In a previous incarnation, he briefly worked for Harper while Harper was pursuing the Alliance leadership.)

**Hexham**, also an occasional radio/TV commentator on how politicians use websites, professes puzzlement. "In 2006, I think the platforms went up right away when the election was called. That's more normal, a lot of people want to get this sort of thing on the web. Certainly in this year's provincial election, Taft's Liberals had their platform up before the call and the PCs right after. These days, the web is key."

Of course, if you're managing media relations you might well decide dribbling out policy a headline a day, is key. And, why put up a big target for other people to fire at, before you need to?

Still, anybody looking for something with which to hold a party leader's feet to the fire in 12 months time, wouldn't find much.

"You know what else they wouldn't find?" adds Hexham. "The date of the election."

I looked. He's right. Not one of the home pages mentions that on Oct. 14, Canadians have to vote.

Maybe they're all like John McCain, too.

[nhannaford@theherald.canwest.com](mailto:nhannaford@theherald.canwest.com)

© The Calgary Herald 2008