

# Get informed *before* you vote



JAKE  
PRINS

I saw a picture once of P Diddy—or Puff Daddy, or whatever he was called at the time—and though I don't remember where or when I saw it, I can clearly recall what it depicted. It was a picture of him wearing a shirt that said "Vote or die." And if you Google that phrase, you too can see that same picture, along with snapshots of numerous other renowned political figures, like Paris Hilton, sporting the same shirt.

But "Vote or die" sounds a little extreme, so I'd like to propose an alternative political slogan: "If you have no clue who to vote for, don't follow orders from a T-shirt." Or maybe something a little more out there, like "Get informed." Otherwise, young people will go out and vote simply because a rapper told them to, which is all well and good except for the fact that you still don't know why or who you should be voting for—and a bunch of uninformed people making uninformed decisions is probably not going to help the process.

I was discussing this matter with my dad, and he told me a story about a guy he'd met once who thought California's population was 10 times that of Canada's, and who was sure that Canada had a population of only

3 million people. I recently had a similar experience while living in Ontario: I was arguing with an Ontarian (about milk bags, of all things), and she concluded her argument by telling me that there were "30 million Ontarians who would disagree with me."

Witnessing the lack of basic knowledge of one's country by some people sometimes makes you wonder if everyone should actually be allowed to vote.

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So my pops had an idea to solve the "uninformed voter" problem, suggesting that for voter to be eligible to vote they should have to pass a test. Your ballot would have two parts, with the first part being the candidates and the second part being five multiple-choice questions. You would have to get three or four of the questions right in order to have your vote count.

They could be fairly simple, like knowing Canada's approximate population. You could also get more creative with it, asking, "Who's the current Prime Minister of Canada?" If you don't know that, you probably don't

know any of the candidates running either, so your vote wouldn't count. They could ask, "Are you holding a pencil right now?" If you answered no, with a pencil, they'd just shred your ballot right then and there. I bet all those Reform Party sympathizers out there who feel the West is under-represented would find this system pretty appealing for the federal elections, as the 30-million-odd people who live in Southern Ontario would end up having their votes disallowed. And then we wouldn't have to worry about electing those damn Liberals and get the number of elected MPs who posed for their press photos wearing a cowboy hat back up to where it should be.

Finally, after the votes were tallied and the ineligible ones were put off to the side, they could give them all to me. I'd mail everyone out a letter informing them of a meeting I'd be holding. I'm not yet sure if the point of the meeting would be to teach them the basics of Canadian history and politics (and believe you me, if I'm teaching it, it's going to be the basics), or if it would be to try to sell them things they don't need—but either way, I'd make sure that everyone would make it.

Then, at the end of the letter, I could write, "If you're thinking about not coming to the meeting, please see the picture I've included in this envelope," and then if they'd been thinking about not attending, they'd look at the picture, which would just be me with a stern look on my face and wearing a T-shirt that says "You have to come." Because then they'd have to, since nobody can argue with a T-shirt.



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Saskatchewan

# To make Alberta politics interesting, we need to stop voting along party lines



ELLIOT  
GOODINE

**"Rather than dividing ourselves along Red, Blue, or Orange lines and giving votes to one party all of the time, we as Albertans should be thinking through each issue and choosing the most reasonable party for the current political and economic climate when we go to the polls."**

With the approach of the provincial election on 3 March, I can't help but look at our neighbours to the south with envy. Compared to the grand production that they put on, it would be a strain to call Alberta politics anything but stagnant and boring.

In America right now, the democratic process has been truly exciting. The Democratic nomination race is so close that I can't help but be captivated by it. I never thought that I would be so fascinated with the stump speeches and micropolitics of each state, but these just happen to be the most interesting things going on in the political world right now.

The Republican vote also still has some excitement left in it too, with the far right attacking their front-runner, John McCain, for not being Republican enough, despite his unerring support for the war in Iraq and the Bush tax cuts, among other things. And now that Mitt Romney has dropped out of the race, Mike Huckabee might be able to capitalize on his Super Tuesday momentum and the anti-McCain vote for a come-from-behind victory.

Voter turnouts in the American primaries so far have also been setting new records, with the current eclectic mix of non-traditional candidates attracting new voters to the polls. Uncertainty

about the many possible outcomes, combined with the belief that change for the better is possible, has made the American presidential race riveting.

Back home, however, we fail to capture that same level of excitement because we have no new players and the current possibilities seem more like inevitabilities. Stelmach has been governing for over a year now, and though he hasn't done much in that time, he has little to fear, because though both Liberal leader Kevin Taft and NDP leader Brian Mason have been through elections before, they've been beaten by the Tories handily each time.

The campaign isn't promising much excitement in terms of issues either, as all of the parties have been pushing their positions for months now. Recent polls have shown a two-to-one lead for the PCs over the Liberals, and the rural Albertans who have been voting Tory for the last 37 years will make it certain that the likelihood of the election of a new government isn't slim—it's none.

If turnouts for younger voters are to improve, it will be necessary to provide voters with a political climate that offers more than a slim chance of a minority for Stelmach's government. The problem, however, is that for a Tory government in Alberta to be defeated, they would probably need to

start an apocalypse or two. In the US, it took two terms with Bush for voters to take notice and start using their political system effectively, yet here in Alberta, we still haven't caught wise after ten.

In order to reinvigorate Alberta's political discourse, voters need to pay more attention and do away with absolute party loyalty. Rather than dividing ourselves along Red, Blue, and Orange lines and giving votes to one party all of the time, we as Albertans should be thinking through each issue and choosing the most reasonable party for the current political and economic climate when we go to the polls. The voters who have invariably supported conservatives for so long have enabled Stelmach's do-nothing approach to government. With our current approach, die-hard Liberals and New Democrats are bound to suffer from continual depression. Alberta politics have simply been on autopilot for far too long to excite us anymore.

We here in Alberta shouldn't need to take a tailspin like America did before we start using our political system effectively and conscientiously. If US politics can teach us any lessons, the re-election of George W Bush in 2004 shows us something: if it looks like the government is headed on the wrong track, get rid of it immediately before it makes more of a mess.

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