

## Do parties need to revisit their vetting processes?

-  Article
-  Comments (17)
- >

GLOBE AND MAIL UPDATE  
SEPTEMBER 23, 2008 AT 8:25 PM EDT

**With Julian West the latest candidate to resign because of an embarrassing controversy, do all parties need to revisit their vetting processes?**



**Greg Lyle** (*former chief of staff for Gary Filmon and Gordon Campbell*): With candidates resigning from the NDP, the Liberals and the Tories, there is no doubt all three parties will want to take a fresh look at their candidate screening processes.

Problem candidates are not new. What is new is the diligence parties regularly apply to candidate selection. The Reform Party really led the way on this development, requiring candidates to fill out information forms and conducting rudimentary background checks. The most vigorous process I have seen was in the B.C. Liberals, led by federal and provincial Liberal Bryan Baynham - someone who could discourage the most ambitious candidates with questioning honed in his Vancouver litigation practice. No one got by him.

That any of the problem candidates in the current campaign got through their respective screening processes is surprising. In most (if not all) of these cases, the candidates were tripped up by material that could have been found by any 12-year-old with Google access.

There are many elements in an election campaign. There's the leader's tour (remember the Liberal plane woes); candidate support (recall the leaked Liberal conference call); the online campaign (Puffin poop); voter contact; advertising; policy; quick response; the list goes on. Candidate screening is just one of those tasks. But failure in any task can lose you a news cycle at best and an election at worst.

Parties risk their reputations on their candidates. Every party needs a Bryan Baynham to protect the party, and indeed the candidates themselves, from the negative publicity that has so dominated the campaign thus far.



**Scott Reid** (*former communications director for Paul Martin*): Shambolic candidate eruptions are obviously not a challenge unique to the NDP. All parties have been tripped up by standard bearers with embarrassing outbursts and skeletons to hide. Sometimes it's worse than simply embarrassing. So before reaching to cast that stone, it's well worth remembering that all political parties dwell in glass houses.

That said, just because it can happen to anyone doesn't mean it's inconsequential when it happens to you. There does appear to be a pattern to these problems for the NDP in B.C., and now that the deadline for filing candidates has passed, it's a big deal. The NDP has lost ridings it had a real shot at winning. If I were running the national campaign for Jack Layton, I'd be on the phone asking why the hell the leader should have to pay the price for sloppy screening. One is forgivable. Two is troubling. After that, it's time to start kicking ass around the committee room.

It is particularly unhelpful at this sensitive juncture. Mr. Layton is running a very sound, superbly strategic campaign. But he's invited Canadians to look upon him as the leader of a potential government. Right now, his B.C. campaign looks more like the wrap party of a Cheech and Chong film.

It is valid to point out that in this day and age of YouTube videos and blogging lunacy, candidate screening is a bit tougher. It used to be that only people worthy of being published had a public record to defend. Now, just about any old loser with a laptop has a canon of previous works. (And yes, it occurs to me that I'm effectively blogging at this very moment - but I've been a proud citizen of Losertown for some time).

Still, it falls to the campaigns. It's not too much to ask that they spend a bit of time on Google before they hand over their party banner. All parties ask their candidates if they've done or said anything that might invite ridicule upon the party. Sure, they might lie. But that's why you put people whose judgment you trust in charge of deciding who's telling the truth.

The NDP's B.C. campaign doesn't just have a candidate problem. It has a campaign management problem.



**Gerald Caplan** (*former NDP campaign manager*): Talk about being off-message. The high-and-mighty NDP seems to be giving the venal Conservatives a run for their money in the candidates-we-can't-afford-to-keep-around stakes.

Of course it doesn't exactly elevate the tone and credibility of the NDP campaign when you know that people who ran around bare nekkid among young girls, and others who were public potheads, chose your party to run for. Hmmm, you can't help mulling, why do these chaps like the NDP so much?

I'm sure there are smart alocs at this very moment who could've told the NDP to keep an eye open. (When you nominate former high-profile dopers, shouldn't a little due diligence be carried out?) But that's easy to be smug

about after the fact. The fact is it's impossible to vet the vast majority of candidates. Let me give you one word as irrefutable proof: Palin. Case rested.

The House of Commons has 308 seats. First, for all parties there are seats that almost no one can find on a map, since they're not anywhere remotely in a party's universe. In the end, parties find "poles" to agree to have their names on the ballot so each can say it's nominating a full slate. It seems you can't be taken seriously if you don't run 308 candidates, poles included, although there's an obvious inherent problem in plucking someone from nowhere. Who knows who they are?

Second, most parties never consider that their nominees are going to get them in trouble, and mostly they're right. So why bother vetting?

Third, no party has the resources to perform the time-consuming vetting process for the entire 308 names, though it probably wouldn't be hard to point to a few potential trouble-makers. In fact, we do all know some of the problem cases in our own parties.

Finally, new technology means that more, rather than fewer, embarrassments will happen in the future. The NDP potheads were caught by videos on the web. The Toronto Conservative wrote a blog that brought him down. This is only beginning.

As for Julian West: Somehow or other, some women in BC recalled Julian West's cavorting nude - 12 years ago. I guess it made a lasting impression on them, and obviously it was an amazingly stupid stunt for Mr. West to have pulled. But 12 years ago? And was this worse than Agriculture Minister Gerry Ritz's verbal idiocies, not to mention his failure to properly regulate meat products? He got away with an apology and his boss is toughing it out.

The world's not a fair place. And messages are hard to stay on.

-  Article
-  Comments (17)
- >

Recommend this article? 1 votes

View the most recommended

## Driving it Home



**German auto makers still love their diesel**

## Real Estate



**Living small the next big thing?**

## Business Incubator