

Is it simply change vs. fear?

B.C. liberals' decade of baggage or the fear of the NDP agenda?

BY JANE SEYD, NORTH SHORE NEWS MAY 1, 2013 2:09 AM

COME election day, North Vancouver-Seymour NDP candidate Jim Hanson hopes voters in his riding will be more upset at the governing Liberals than they are scared of the prospect of change.

It'll be an uphill battle for Hanson. The riding has leaned solidly to the right for decades.

But Hanson says he hears the oft-repeated message of NDP leader Adrian Dix resonating with voters. "There's an overwhelming desire for change. . . ." he says. "This particular government is not respected. At the same time, they want to make sure the change is actually in the right direction."

The tension between being angry with the Liberals for a decade of government sins and being afraid of what the NDP might do in power is one of the key dynamics still shaping the provincial election, said Greg Lyle, a pollster and political strategist at Innovative Research.

Max Cameron, a professor of political science at the University of British Columbia, agrees. Voters may be tired of the government, he said, but they are also apprehensive of the NDP.

That's in part what's driving the NDP message that change under Dix would not be instantaneous and sweeping, but take place slowly and incrementally.

Advocating "Goldilocks change" - not too hot and not too cold - is likely the party's best bet of appealing to skittish voters said Lyle.

Hanson sees it as a sensible approach. "We live in a very complicated society," he said. "Maybe we need to proceed very cautiously."

For Liberal candidates, the party's decade-long term in office presents a particular challenge.

"The average voter will vote not so much in favour of (a political party), but in opposition to the existing regime," said David Laycock, a professor of political science at Simon Fraser University.

Veteran West Vancouver Capilano Liberal MLA Ralph Sultan is keenly aware of that.

The desire for change is a powerful psychological signal and one that is "embedded in our brains," said Sultan.

"No democratic government has lasted forever," he added. "It's almost arithmetic. No government is perfect in terms of its decisions . . . governments collect baggage."

Politically, "The rule of thumb is friends come and go, while enemies accumulate," said Lyle.