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JANE TABER AND THE GLOBE'S PARLIAMENTARY BUREAU SET THE AGENDA

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What Rebagliati and Ignatieff have in common

Jane Taber

B.C. Liberal candidate Ross Rebagliati, of Nagano Olympic snowboard fame, is [attracting fire](#) from the Tories over comments he made about the monarchy in Canada.

Mr. Rebagliati thinks it's time for Canada to move on from having a Queen.

The Tories are making much of this because it is such a touchy subject in Canada, and they are asking whether Liberal Leader Michael Ignatieff supports his candidate's view.

And while a senior Liberal official dismissed the question, saying they are looking forward to the Queen's upcoming visit to Canada, Mr. Rebagliati says he has much in common with his leader.

For example, they have both lived abroad.

"I spent over ten years in Europe myself racing," he said in a recent interview. "It gave me the opportunity to see how other societies function and I think Mr. Ignatieff the same experience."

The Tories ran an effective negative ad campaign against Mr. Ignatieff, criticizing him for living abroad for several decades. The "just visiting" campaign helped to define him as an out-of-touch leader.

But Mr. Rebagliati defends living outside of the country: "That's a valuable lesson to have under your belt ... to know how other countries function and the difference between Canada and the rest of the world."

He says it gives you "more perspective" and adds: "These are things you can't learn at school."

Another commonality between the two men, Mr. Rebagliati says, is attracting more young people to vote.

He thinks he can relate to those disaffected youths who don't follow politics because he is a good role model, doing the same things they do such as snowboarding and other activities.

"In Canada a lot of us don't even have the willpower to vote ... That to me is just incomprehensible," he says, especially when Canadian soldiers are putting their lives on the line to fight for democracy in Afghanistan.

Coincidentally, organizing new political groups and political engagement is the subject of a [new poll from Nanos Research](#).

Pollster Nik Nanos tested Canadians' impressions of Facebook groups as a political vehicle and what type of influence they should have on government and government decisions.

His interest was sparked by the [Facebook group](#) that sprung up opposing prorogation. It quickly grew to about 250,000 members and led to rallies across the country.

And he discovered that young Canadian adults do not think that social networking forums [should sway the government](#).

This surprised him, he said. “I was expecting stronger numbers from younger Canadians and a more dramatic digital divide between young Canadians and everyone else.”

He said the lesson for anyone in government or political party from this is that they should see Facebook as a “political mobilizer and not indicative of political heft in the marketplace.”

Mr. Rebagliati, meanwhile, has a comprehensive website and uses that as one political tool. But he is also going about politics the old way – meeting as many people as possible.

He says he runs into (not literally) lots of potential voters on the ski hill all the time. “That’s resonating,” he says.

(File photo: Fernando Morales/The Globe and Mail)

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