

TODAY: H -1 / L -3  
Isolated flurries  
5 Day Forecast  
**YOUNG DRIVERS** GO



----- GO TO -----  
**ONTARIO.CA/TAXSAVINGS**  
TO FIND OUT MORE. Paid for by the Government of Ontario.

My subscription   Order photos   Contact us   About us   Traffic  
Search Mercury   Search the Web   Find a Local Business  
**Quick Search** **GO** **GO**  
[Advanced Search](#) | [Full Text Article Archive](#)   [Search Goldbook.ca](#)

## Ignatieff should just keep ducking and weaving

April 06, 2009

**GEOFFREY STEVENS**

The media is (or should that be "are?") a curious beast.

The beast -- I'm thinking here of the National Corps of Heavy Pundits (or Ottawa Punditi, as they are sometimes called) -- has spent the past three years pummelling Prime Minister Stephen Harper. In the eyes of the punditi, Harper is as aloof as ever from ordinary people, as control freakish, as mean-spirited, and as maddeningly inconsistent.

But the media beast is inconsistent, too. In the past few weeks there have been recurring signs that the punditi -- wearying, perhaps, of bashing the prime minister to little avail -- are changing their focus. Michael Ignatieff, the Liberal leader, has come into their crosshairs.

Let it be said in Ignatieff's defence that he has been interim leader only since Dec. 10; he won't become the real leader until the party convention in Vancouver later this month. But the pundits, from the Toronto Star's Chantal Hébert ("Over the first four months of his leadership, wrestling a definitive policy out of the Liberal leader has become almost as difficult as identifying a Paul Martin priority") on down, aren't cutting him any slack.

Ignatieff is supposed to be a public intellectual, isn't he? He's a Harvard/Oxford man, author of 16 books, and, yet, after four full months on the job, he still hasn't revealed a comprehensive plan to address the global economic crisis. Where is his made-in Stornoway remedy for the woes of the auto industry? Where is his Green Plan (no, not that carbon-tax thing of Stéphane Dion's)? Does he believe in gun control, or will he let the Harper government get away with abolishing the firearms registry?

And where does he stand on Quebec? Does he or does he not support the Harper government's "Quebec as a nation" policy? As Chantal Hébert puts it: "Ignatieff's federal-provincial relations agenda is, at best, a blank slate and, at worst, a series of disconnected dots."

Hébert is perceptive and well-informed; politicians pay attention to her opinions. And it is her opinion, as she wrote last week, that it's time Ignatieff stopped ducking and started fighting.

My advice to Ignatieff would be different. I would tell him to "pull a Harper" -- that is, to ignore the punditi, at least a little longer. I would note that, since he became leader in December, the Liberals have staged a Lazarus-like recovery in the polls; the latest Nanos Research poll has them three points ahead of the Conservatives nationally -- 36 per cent to 33 -- and rising. They are 13 points ahead in Ontario (44-31); in Quebec they are solidly in second place, within four points of the Bloc Québécois and 13 points ahead of the third-place Tories.

When Quebecers are asked which leader would make the best prime minister, more of them choose Ignatieff than either the Bloc's Gilles Duceppe or Harper.

The polls can be as fickle as the pundits, but money still talks in politics. And money is rolling in once more to Liberal coffers. One thousand Liberals paid \$500 apiece to hear Ignatieff at a fundraiser in Toronto last week. The party is united again and there is a sense of excitement among Liberals as they look to Vancouver and beyond.

The time for policies will come, but opposition parties that get the timing wrong pay a heavy price. In 1974, with inflation rampant, the Conservatives under Robert Stanfield made the mistake of

Email story  
Print  
Choose text size  
Report typo or correction  
View newspaper PDF  
SHARE

### More Stories

- [Citizens entitled to quick solution](#)
- [Another view: A bad law](#)
- [Financial chaos offers us no maps to ...](#)
- [Bernanke out on an economic limb](#)
- [Eventually, U.S. taxpayers will have ...](#)

proposing a wage and price freeze as they went into an election campaign. They lost, badly. In 2007, the Ontario Conservatives embraced public funding for faith-based schools. They should have killed the idea or waited until after the election; they didn't do either, and they lost. The same fate befell Dion and the Liberals with their carbon tax in last fall's federal election.

Ignatieff doesn't need an arsenal of policies just yet. It makes better political sense to keep picking apart government mistakes and policies than to set up Liberal policies for Tory target practice.

Cambridge resident Geoffrey Stevens, an author and former Ottawa columnist and managing editor of the Globe and Mail, teaches political science at Wilfrid Laurier University and the University of Guelph. He welcomes comments at [geoffstevens@sympatico.ca](mailto:geoffstevens@sympatico.ca)

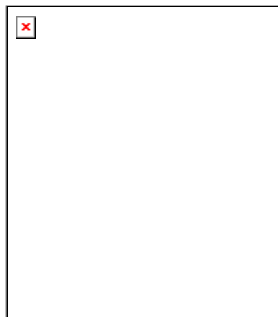
Place Your Classified Ad

---

Automobiles	Items Under \$100
Jobs @ Workopolis	Real Estate
Notices/Tenders	Births

**SPECIAL FEATURES**

**Agri-food forum**



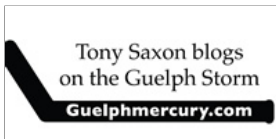
**Forty Under Forty**



**Design Crime Makeover**



**Guelph Storm**



**Fitness challenge**



**Mercury Blogs**



**City Hall**



**Job Board**



**Consumer guides**



----- GO TO -----  
**ONTARIO.CA/TAXSAVINGS**  
 TO FIND OUT MORE.

Paid for by the Government of Ontario.

**Magazines**

- Guelph Life
- Grand Magazine
- Rex Magazine



**Advertisement**

Mercury Job Search

Employment ads from The Mercury are hosted by **Workopolis**.

Use the Workopolis search box below, or browse by date at [mercury.workopolis.com](http://mercury.workopolis.com)

**ENTER KEYWORD**

**SITEMAP**

<p><a href="#">Home</a>  <a href="#">Today's PDFs</a>  <b>News</b>  <a href="#">Local</a>  <a href="#">Front</a>  <a href="#">Business</a>  <a href="#">Canada</a>  <a href="#">World</a></p>	<p><b>Sports</b>  <a href="#">NHL</a>  <a href="#">MLB</a>  <a href="#">NBA</a>  <a href="#">NFL</a>  <a href="#">Sports Wire</a></p>	<p><b>Life</b>  <a href="#">Life Wire</a>  <a href="#">Faith</a>  <a href="#">Books</a>  <a href="#">Travel</a>  <a href="#">Community Events</a>  <a href="#">Community Web Directory</a></p>	<p><b>Arts</b>  <a href="#">Entertainment Wire</a>  <a href="#">Movies</a>  <a href="#">Dining Guide</a>  <a href="#">Entertainment Calendar</a>  <a href="#">Nightlife</a></p>	<p><b>Here</b>  <b>Opinions</b>  <a href="#">Editorial Cartoon</a>  <a href="#">Letters to the Editor</a>  <a href="#">Submit a Letter to the Editor</a>    <a href="#">Multimedia</a>  <a href="#">Celebrations</a></p>	<p><b>Obituaries</b>    <b>Consumer Guides</b>    <b>Auto</b>  <a href="#">Auto Showcase</a>  <a href="#">Wheels.ca</a>  <a href="#">World of Wheels</a>  <a href="#">Car Guide Magazine</a>  <a href="#">Canadian Autoworld</a></p>	<p><b>Classified</b>  <a href="#">Lottery Results</a>    <a href="#">Daily Horoscope</a></p>
---	---	--	---	--	--	--