

## FEATURE

# Muttart, one of the Conservatives' top guns in campaign strategy

Whiz kid Patrick Muttart is credited with playing a successful and very central role in the last election campaign. Tories hope he'll deliver again next time.

By **ABBAS RANA**

At the end of the 2006 election campaign, senior Conservative campaign staffers were credited with running a mostly error-free, creative, coherent, and well-prepared campaign. But behind that success **Patrick Muttart**, deputy chief of staff to the Prime Minister for strategic planning, was one of the top players. Mr. Muttart is credited today with playing a very central role in the success of the Conservative Party campaign.

In the next election campaign, Conservatives say, Mr. Muttart will again be a key player. He will define the ballot box question, the core positioning of the party as it relates to the opposition parties and the messaging and campaign advertising.

In so doing, Mr. Muttart who is in his mid-30s, will work closely with campaign manager **Doug Finley**; head of scripting **Guy Giorno**; chief of staff to the Prime Minister **Ian Brodie**; legislative assistant to the Prime Minister **Bruce Carson**; and **Mark Cameron**, director of policy and research to the Prime Minister. All are tasked with crafting the Conservative Party's campaign platform. **Kory Teneycke**, director of the Conservative Caucus Research Bureau, will be responsible for the rapid response unit, and **Perry Miele**, a Toronto-based marketing and ad executive, will help shape the party's advertising campaign.

During the course of the election campaign, Mr. Muttart will be one of the senior campaign aides who will deal with unforeseen issues that arise frequently once the campaign starts.

Conservatives say that Mr. Muttart's strength is to identify voter groups that are more likely than others to support their party by making use of polls and focus groups and by using market research to determine which political messages or ads to craft and which media outlets to use in putting out the Conservative political messaging.

"He's a specialist in branding and in getting a [communications] product out there. Patrick defines who our target voters are," said one Conservative. "As opposed to daily communications, he does strategic communications, the overall design of the message to be projected and how do we best get our message out for maximum impact."

Tom Flanagan, former chief campaign organizer and a close friend of Prime Minister Stephen Harper's (Calgary Southwest, Alta.), in his most recent book *Harper's Team: Behind the Scenes in the Conservative Rise to Power*, outlined some of the voter groups that Mr. Muttart identified. "To make it understandable to our advertising team," Mr. Flanagan wrote that Mr. Muttart "created fictional people to epitomize our core and swing voters, as well as those who would never support."

For example, "Steve and Heather" typified one part of our core support: in their forties, married with three children, Protestant, with

Steve owning his own business. Another core voter was 'Eunice,' a widower in her seventies, also Protestant, living on a modest pension but owning her own home. 'Dougie,' single, in his late twenties, working at Canadian Tire, represented one type of swing voter. He agreed with us on issues such as crime and welfare abuse, but he was more interested in hunting and fishing than politics and often didn't bother to vote. He was potentially supportive but hard to reach. 'Rick and Brenda,' a common law couple with working class jobs, represented another set of swing voters, as did the better-off 'Mike and Teresa,' who probably would be Conservative core supporters except for their Catholic background," Mr. Flanagan wrote in his book.

Mr. Muttart also identified voters who would never support the Conservatives. For example, "'Zoë' (affectionately named after the president's daughter in 'West Wing'), 25, single, with a degree in sociology, practising yoga and eating organic food in her central city apartment; and 'Marcus and Fiona,' a high-income couple with no kids, professional jobs, feeling part of the establishment and loving it," Mr. Flanagan wrote.

Mr. Muttart is known to be an avid student of elections in English-speaking countries around the world. In the 2006 federal election campaign, Mr. Muttart used a number of campaign tactics used by Australia's then-prime minister John Howard in his four successful consecutive election campaigns such as targeting certain middle class voter groups and rather than announcing all of the election platform on one day announcing one policy initiative per day. During last year's Australian election campaign, Mr. Muttart traveled and spent a couple of weeks in Australia in the fall to observe the election campaign which Mr. Howard lost.

Conservative sources told *The Hill Times* that prior to the 2006 federal election, their party used to have a number of people doing the work that Mr. Muttart did or would do in the next election.

"The big difference is that in the past, there wasn't necessarily one person doing



Photograph by Jake Wright, *The Hill Times*

**Whiz kid:** Patrick Muttart, deputy chief of staff to Prime Minister Stephen Harper, played an integral role in the last election campaign and will do so again in the next one. Mr. Muttart will define the ballot box question, the core positioning of the party, the messaging, and the party's campaign advertising strategy.

what Patrick's doing. In the past, it tended to be a piece of someone's job or it was something that was hired out. You went with a marketing firm or an advertising firm or something and they did the creative brief or they did a lot of that work for you whereas this time around, you actually have someone who is in charge of big the picture stuff and how does that integrate throughout the entire campaign. The importance of Patrick is that he's very good at it," said one Tory.

When asked if Mr. Muttart was better at this than other people, the source said: "If you win, you're a genius. We won last time so he's a genius. All of Paul Martin's boys were great too until they lost. Patrick's very good at it because he's got a huge breadth of knowledge and not only can he develop a strategy, he can also implement it."

Mr. Flanagan in his book explained why they decided to bring Mr. Muttart on board full-time for the last election time:

"We had never had someone like Patrick on the campaign team—a high-level strategist with an ability to think in visual terms and dramatize policy. Ken Boessenkool, as a trained economist, tended to think in dry analytical terms. Patrick, in contrast, has an eye for colour schemes, photo ops, sound bites, advertising, and all the other things that bring political communications to life. We already had the ingredients of successful communications—opposition research, policy advice, graphic design, advertising, polling—but we needed someone like

Patrick, with the flair to make them work together and support each other."

Most Conservative MPs and strategists declined on-the-record interview requests for this story, saying that their party has a policy of not discussing political strategy but Conservative MP Pierre Poilievre (Nepean-Carleton, Ont.) in a brief comment said: "Patrick Muttart is a very bright mind with a very practical understanding of political strategy. Everyone in political life likes to think of themselves as a strategist, there are very few people who have the acumen necessary to mirror that title. Patrick is one of those few people."

Meanwhile, Mr. Muttart who is a native of Woodstock, Ont., first came to the Hill in 1993 as a junior staffer to work in then-Reform Party leader **Preston Manning's** office. After a few years, he was hired as a marketing director by a hotel chain and then he took a job with the Toronto-based communications firm Navigator. In the 2004 federal election, he was brought on board to work with **Ken Boessenkool**, then-a senior adviser in the OLO to work on daily election campaign scripting for the duration of the campaign and then returned back to Toronto. Mr. Muttart was brought back to the Hill prior to the start of the 2006 federal election campaign to work full-time in the then-Harper OLO and since then has been working for Mr. Harper.

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## Pollster Nik Nanos appointed a Research Associate Professor

Nanos Research is pleased to announce that President & CEO Nik Nanos has been appointed by the Provost of The State University of New York as a Research Associate Professor in Canadian Studies. As part of the faculty at the University at Buffalo (SUNY), Mr. Nanos will be conducting research on issues related to Canada-US relations. Leading the Nanos Research team and providing strategic advice to Canada's leading corporate, government and non-profit organizations will continue to be the main focus of Mr. Nanos.

Mr. Nanos is one of Canada's most trusted pollsters and is regularly called upon by senior decision-makers to conduct research and to provide strategic counsel. He is the past National President of the Marketing Research and Intelligence Association and is the official pollster for CPAC, the Cable Public Affairs Channel, Quebecor's Sun and Osprey Media Groups, and Policy Options Magazine.

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