



Politically incorrect

Residents don't seem to be all that interested in the coming byelection in the riding of St. Paul's

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Sun Media's Jonathan Jenkins profiles the St. Paul's riding ahead of a by-election set for Sept. 17.

Sorry politicians -- Yonge and Eligible just isn't that into you.

For many of the hip, urban, young professionals who make this midtown neighbourhood home, the fact that Dalton McGuinty's Liberals, Tim Hudak's Conservatives and Andrea Horwath's NDP want their vote would be news to them. "This is the first I'm hearing about it," said area resident Reena Kudhail, a media relations co-ordinator and relatively recent arrival from Montreal.

The byelection was also not top of mind for resident Mena Gagne, owner of Dare To Be Real, a coaching and consulting company.

"I haven't heard but I also haven't been that interested in politics," Gagne said. "I'm just trying to do my own thing in the world and make an impact where I can. I'm so busy doing that, that whole area just isn't a focus for me."

McGuinty announced this week that voters in St. Paul's will be going to the polls Sept. 17 to choose a successor to Liberal cabinet minister Michael Bryant.

TOUGH SLOG AHEAD

Just getting people's attention, let alone earning their votes, will be a tough slog for the candidates.

Pollster Nik Nanos, of Nanos Research, said provincial politics just isn't that sexy at the moment.

"In my experience, voters tend to focus on the level of government that seems to be the most exciting and right now, even if you're in downtown Toronto, you're probably more interested in what's happening federally because of Stephen Harper and Michael Ignatieff. As a result, there's just less of a focus on provincial politics," Nanos said. "We might see another deadly low voter turnout in a byelection just because of lack of interest."

The riding of St. Paul's straddles the urban centre of Toronto.

According to the 2001 Statistics Canada census, St. Paul's residents tend to be aged 25-44, university educated and single.

The vast majority speak English as their first language, and most identified themselves as Catholic, followed by Protestant and then Jewish.

They're most commonly employed in business, finance, administration, management and retail.

In addition to the young and single people who reside in one of the many highrises around Yonge and Eglinton, giving the neighbourhoods its Yonge and Eligible moniker, upscale homes, where the average family income is \$130,384 a year, fan out from the intersection.

Their default political position is Liberal.

"Typically I am a Liberal supporter but I have a soft spot for the Greens and hopefully one day they will get a seat," chef Jeffrey Vandervalk said.

Kudhail said she also favours the Grits, while her friend Erica Brit likes the Green Party.

"I've traditionally always voted Liberal," Kudhail said. "That may be a generational thing -- my father always voted Liberal and that's the views I kind of sided with."

Gagne said she was a Liberal supporter, but "then I just kind of lost interest."

The byelection may not hold much interest for locals, but provincial political observers are keen on it.

Candidate Sue-Ann Levy, on a leave of absence from her Toronto Sun city hall column, is a major coup for newly-minted PC Leader Tim Hudak, Nanos said.

"This byelection is probably more about symbolism than political outcomes," Nanos said. "And for the Conservatives, it's the symbolism of the candidate that they have. For Tim Hudak, based on some of the stereotypes that people have tried to slap on him, to have a candidate like this is actually very good news."

In addition to her reputation as a feisty fiscal Conservative, Levy is urban, female, Jewish and gay in a party that has become identified with a largely white, male, Christian rural caucus.

Dr. Eric Hoskins, who co-founded War Child Canada along with his wife Dr. Samantha Nutt, is carrying the Liberal flag. His religious affiliation, if any, is not included in his official biography.

The NDP have yet to select its candidate.

Since 1999, St. Paul's has been faithfully sending Bryant to Queen's Park.

The former cabinet minister's high octane political style did not mesh well with that of his leader Dalton McGuinty, who describes his own moderate approach to political life as "never too high, never too low, just relentless."

THEIR RIDING TO LOSE

Bryant resigned his seat in June to run the City of Toronto's economic development agency. With the Liberals comfortably ensconced in the mid-40s in the polls, it is their riding to lose, Nanos said.

The summer of discontent for the Liberals -- with MPPs being grilled at backyard barbecues over the spending scandal at eHealth Ontario and the planned harmonized sales tax -- does not seem to have made an impact in the busy, social lives of uptown residents.

"There's two types of issues -- issues that people talk about and issues that change votes," Nanos said. "And as of yet, eHealth hasn't really penetrated the ballot box."

Win or lose, though, Hudak comes out looking good because he was able to get such a high-profile candidate to run for him in Toronto in his first byelection challenge as leader, Nanos said.

"It's quite possible that the Liberals and the Conservatives could come out winners in this from the point of view of public opinion where the Liberals hold onto a seat that everyone expected them to win, and Tim Hudak ... has been able to show that the Progressive Conservative Party under his leadership is a big tent," Nanos said.

"I think if we were looking at possible narratives coming out of the byelection, it'll be the Liberals and the Conservatives coming out winners and the NDP potentially coming out on the short end of the stick if they don't do respectfully in the riding."