

Local campaigns crucial to Ontario election strategies

Continued from front

the province.

Now, with an additional new seat up for grabs in each city, voters should see party leaders and other heavyweights making a local appearance or two in the days and weeks remaining before the June 7 vote.

Both Liberal Leader Kathleen Wynne and New Democrat Leader Andrea Horwath have already made a point of attending a nomination meeting and rally for local candidates.

Ontario Progressive Conservative Leader Doug Ford was scheduled to join a candidate on the Mississauga campaign trail earlier this month, but the spring ice storm threw cold water on those plans.

Anticipate stops in Mississauga and Brampton to be back on his travel itinerary soon.

So what is it that draws political campaign muscle

to these two cities ranked among the 10 most populous in the country?

Voter turnout certainly hasn't been impressive.

At 45.6 per cent in 2014 and 41.6 per cent in 2011, the combined voter turnout in the two municipalities has averaged well below provincial rates of 51.3 per cent in 2014 and 48.2 per cent in 2011.

In fact, voters in Mississauga-Brampton South managed the poorest participation rate (41.5 per cent) in the province when Ontario last went to the polls.

Despite the lethargy among the general electorate, the parties have found engaged and effective grassroots membership corps in these communities come campaign time and election night.

In particular, the South Asian community, which now numbers more than 430,000 Peel residents according to most recent

census data, has grown to become a fervent political force when determining candidates and local election races.

That clout has not gone unnoticed or untapped by party brass who understand elections are often won and lost at the grassroots level.

A party able to harness those local forces when political winds are blowing in the right direction can propel a campaign to shore in choppy waters.

Observers need look no further than the historic election win former MPP Jagmeet Singh orchestrated in 2011 to give the New Democrats their first ever seat in Bramalea-Gore-Malton and end the Liberal stranglehold in Brampton.

Singh has since used that foothold to make a successful jump to the New Democrat federal leadership.

But his election and re-



Riziero Vertolli/Metroland

Premier Wynne embraces Brampton East Liberal candidate Dr. Parminder Singh at campaign rally. Residents in Mississauga and Brampton can expect the three major parties to throw significant campaign resources behind winning "target" ridings.

election victories, in what had traditionally been no man's land for candidates running under anything

but a Liberal or Conservative banner, stand as proof the right candidate and a well-oiled political ma-

chinery can dictate campaign fortunes in these crucial suburban battlegrounds.

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