



Protesters demonstrating against TransCanada's proposed Energy East pipeline route along the South Shore of Quebec, including a proposed marine terminal at Cacouna, a breeding area of the Beluga whale, an endangered species. In Quebec, the environment is an election issue. *Montreal Gazette* photo

## Quebec and Campaign 2015: TOM MULCAIR IS NOT JACK LAYTON AND JUSTIN TRUDEAU IS NOT MICHAEL IGNATIEFF

Bernard St-Laurent

*Quebec surprised the rest of the country in 2011 by sweeping Jack Layton's NDP into Official Opposition status in the House of Commons. Polls ahead of the 2015 election show that Justin Trudeau could rob Tom Mulcair of the chance to coattail on that Orange Wave. Mostly, Quebec voters are keen on the person most likely to beat Stephen Harper. And, they have other issues.*

Last November 19, about 1.3 million Quebecers tuned in Radio-Canada's popular TV Sunday night talk show, *Tout le monde en parle*. Many viewers wanted to find out to whom Gabriel Nadeau-Dubois, the 24-year-old former student leader, was going to donate the \$25,000 he received along with the Governor General's French language award for non-fiction.

At 24, Nadeau-Dubois is the youngest person to receive the prize, which

was created in the 1930s. The handsome, charismatic and passionate sovereigntist said he had struggled over whether or not he would accept the prize. He finally agreed when he learned it celebrates the arts and literature. More importantly, the money comes from the Canada Council for the Arts and not directly from the Queen's representative in Canada.



Former student activist Gabriel Nadeau-Dubois, 25, tells 1.3 million viewers on *Tout le monde en parle* that he's donating his \$25,000 prize for the Governor General's award for non-fiction to Energy East pipeline opponents. Radio-Canada image

Nadeau-Dubois, or GND as he is known, announced he would donate his prize money to a tiny collective of grass-roots community organizations that is fighting TransCanada's Energy East plan to build a pipeline across Quebec and set up a deep water port at Gros-Cacouna, near Rivière-du-loup.

The author of *Tenir tête* (Headstrong) told viewers he had set up a crowd sourcing site and called on them to match his donation in order to: "fight the powerful interests supported by the federal government who want to impose a project on us which will transform our country (Quebec) into a freeway for petroleum from the oil sands," he said.

Nadeau-Dubois asked viewers to match his \$25,000. Six days later, when he shut down the website, he had collected \$385,330.

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## Environmental issues in Quebec, especially those connected to oil transport, have taken on enormous significance since the catastrophic train derailment which killed 49 people at Lac-Mégantic in July 2013.

Quebecers have also long felt a special connection to the beluga whale, which is native to the St. Lawrence River.

The very idea that the port would be built in the heart of the beluga's calving grounds made the project seem even more outrageous. The fact the federal government declared the Beluga an endangered species and that Quebec Premier Philippe Couillard told TransCanada to build the port elsewhere, while the project is under review by the National Energy Board, hasn't changed the underlying anger toward the project.

New Democratic Party leader Thomas Mulcair knows the impact an appearance on *Tout le monde en parle* can have in Quebec society.

In 2011, the NDP swept 59 out of 75 seats in Quebec. Clearly, that historic breakthrough happened thanks in part to Jack Layton's performance on *Tout le monde en parle* during the campaign. When the smiling man with the cane received a standing ovation from the studio audience during the rehearsal on his first appearance early in the campaign, it was clear that something big was going on.

So, on the Tuesday after Nadeau-Dubois began his crowd sourcing crusade, Mulcair published a long op-ed piece in *La Presse* denouncing the federal government's approach, calling for sweeping environmental evaluations and flat-out rejecting the Cacouna port proposal.

That positioning is important because the Bloc Québécois is the only federal party categorically and publicly opposed to the pipeline and the port.

Francophone Quebecers left the Bloc in droves to support the NDP in the last election. The Bloc's vote shrunk by nearly half

to 23 per cent of the popular vote, while they plummeted from 47 to only four seats in the House, losing recognized party status and staff, to say nothing of visibility in question period. The Bloc virtually disappeared from the news cycle.

The BQ had been on a steep downward slide, even before members elected Mario Beaulieu, a divisive, hard-nosed separatist as their leader last June. Two MPs, half the remaining Bloc caucus, have since quit over his hard line on Quebec sovereignty.

EKOS and Ipsos Reid surveys in late 2014 both suggested Bloc support may have bottomed out. Beaulieu has not backed down from the hard line. He attacked former leaders of the party, denouncing what he described as an attitude of complacency and defeatism. He even forced media mogul Pierre Karl Péladeau, the front runner in the race to become the new leader of the Parti Québécois, to backtrack after Péladeau publicly questioned the pertinence of the Bloc.

The last thing the NDP wants is to get into a battle with the Bloc on such a polarizing issue as the pipeline. Fortunately for Mulcair, Nadeau-Dubois told me he never personally takes a position in federal elections. But like it or not, the Energy East project will be an issue in the next election. More than in any other province, the environment is always an issue in Quebec.

By all accounts, most of the Quebec NDP MPs have been present and effective in their ridings. In 2011, Ruth Ellen Brosseau became the symbol of token candidates, or *poteaux* (telephone polls) the NDP was offering up to fill its roster of standard bearers in Quebec, when she ran in Berthier-Maskinongé, northeast of Montreal. A single mother then working as a manager of a campus bar at Car-



leton University, she took a week off during the campaign to take a long-scheduled vacation in Las Vegas. But in the Layton sweep, she won her Joliette-area riding by 10 points over the Bloc.

Only months after the election, local mayors were already praising her for the interest she was taking in their issues and how hard she was working at representing them in Ottawa where, as NDP deputy agriculture critic, she has become an effective champion of supply management in dairy and poultry, key agricultural sectors in Quebec.

**O**n the south shore of Montreal, NDP MPs are highly visible in the campaign to prevent the Conservative government from establishing tolls on the new Champlain Bridge. In the Eastern Townships, Pierre-Luc Dusseault, the youngest member in the history of the country has maintained high-profile fights against cuts to Canada Post and for a respectable airport in the Sherbrooke region.

Mulcair will need the hard work on the ground put in by his Quebec MPs to keep the NDP in the fight to hold a majority of seats in the province in the next election.

That's because, in spite of all he is doing right, when it comes to voters hearts, Tom Mulcair is no Jack Layton and Justin Trudeau is not Michael Ignatieff. In 2011, the NDP took 59 seats in Quebec with 43 per cent of the vote and the Liberals held on to seven with only 14 per cent of the vote.

Many observers had predicted that Trudeau would be incapable of rebuilding the Liberal Party in Quebec. They expected he would not be well received in Quebec, unable to overcome his father's legacy, which, unlike everywhere else in the country, is negatively associated with the patriation of the Constitution over Quebec's objections.

But as it turns out, while it's true Mulcair is seen as competent and in-tune with Quebec values, Trudeau

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is far from being despised. In fact, a survey conducted for Abacus data in November 2014 states "Trudeau is seen as conveying the best image of Quebec and Quebecers elsewhere and better at motivating people to follow his leadership".

In 2011 the Liberals were only able to hold on to ridings in the Montreal region that were concentrated in allophone and anglophone areas.

In 2015, the first seats the Liberals should win back are those with the same demographic profile in Montreal's West End, on the West Island, in Laval north of Montreal and on the south shore.

There is no better sign that a party is making a comeback than how hotly contested the candidate nomination meetings are. Results for the selection of a Liberal candidate in the riding of Laval-les-Iles are under official review after a fierce race that pitted members of the local Greek, Lebanese and Armenian multicultural communities against each other.

**S**tephen Harper's Conservatives won only five seats in Quebec in 2011, with 16.5 per cent of the vote. An optimistic objective for the Conservatives would be to jump from five to 10, in the new 338-seat House of Commons, in which Quebec's representation will increase by three ridings, from 75 to 78 seats. All three new seats are in the Montreal region, where the Conservatives are weak. Their strength, such as it is, is concentrated in the 418 region in and around Quebec City.

Early in 2014, Denis Lebel, Stephen Harper's Quebec lieutenant, began trying to recruit top candidates for the next election. He met with municipal mayors from the Mauricie region, former Liberal cabinet ministers in the Charest government, and

members of the National Assembly who now sit as MNAs for the conservative-minded Coalition Avenir Québec, led by Francois Legault.

So far, no one has said yes to Lebel's invitation. Only Gérard Deltell, the CAQ member for the Quebec City riding of Chauveau, has kept the door open to a possible run. But Deltell sees himself as a true conservative and has serious misgivings about resigning his seat in the legislature and provoking a costly by-election.

Most public opinion polls show the Conservatives at or below their 2011 score. So the likely best-case scenario is for them to hold onto the four seats they own in the rural areas across from Quebec City on the south shore of the St. Lawrence as well as Lebel's own 418 riding in the Saguenay, but no more.

Political analysts often talk about the "mirror effect" between Quebec and Ontario. If voters are not passionately committed to a party or a specific leader, they will take a look across the Ottawa River at which way their neighbours in the other province are leaning and decide if they will go along.

The Abacus poll report showed Quebec francophones have a preference for Mulcair and the NDP. But the same survey also showed that a clear majority of francophones will vote for whomever they believe can beat Stephen Harper. And for the time being, they apparently believe that person is Justin Trudeau. **P**

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