So Premier Stelmach is stepping down with just one term in office in the rearview mirrors of his combine. One reason given was quite surprising; he claimed he’s afraid of attack ads. He made the announcement with his wife by his side (almost looking like she had a gun in his ribs), and some criticized him for caving to the impending threat (of the attack ads, I mean, not the gun). Personally, however, I don’t blame him. Attack ads make me madder than KFC commercials when I’m trying to diet.
There are many reasons to attack these attack ads. Nothing’s worse than trying to relax in front of the boob tube for some mental flat-lining (any reality show will do), only to have your reverie interrupted by some grim voice talking of our collective impending doom if this person or that party should attain power. However... there’s hope! We can vote for the party who paid for the attack ad who is barely mentioned in the entire commercial! Lucky us. So now, instead of calmly enjoying our television watching, now we’re angry. Those guys pull wings of ladybugs? Kick babies? And we might have voted for them? What have we done?
Then comes the attack ads from the other side… what? The other guys torture puppies? Hunt baby pandas? Oh no! Now who are we going to vote for? One of these guys is going to win and the entire universe will be thrown into disarray! How can we possibly enjoy our Star Trek re-re-re-re-(re X 100,000) run with the Fate of Everything hanging in the balance? There won’t be any James T Kirk to save the day if either of these guys gets in. Taxes will skyrocket, services will be non-existent in either official language, and yes, terrorists will surely run rampant, even here in Calmar.
‘But wait, ’ countered a voice in my head (just one of many, I should add). ‘That’s what they said would happen if those guys won the last election and the universe appeared to unfold as it should, more or less.’ (Another voice then brought up KFC again but I shushed it.)
Okay, so now, besides being angry and frightened, I’m conflicted, too. Who does one believe? What if one side is right and the other side is evil incarnate in a three-piece suit? How can one tell which side is the evil incarnate one? What if the attack ads for both sides are true? Then who do we vote for? Eventually, we’re so confused and distrustful of the whole lot of them, we do the only rational thing. We don’t vote. In droves. More people vote for their favourite figure skating duo in Battle of the Blades than for political candidates anymore. Soon, the only people voting will be news junkies, political hacks whose jobs depend on the outcome and the candidates’ families, who will all, no doubt, get jobs if their kin should win.
Besides ruining TV watching and scaring away voters from the polls, attack ads also scare away high calibre would-be candidates. If I am a capable, solid, respectable guy with integrity up the wazoo (just pretend for a sec, for the sake of argument here) then why on earth would I subject myself to whatever dirt these guys can excavate from my past? Everybody’s done things they regret, and really, would we actually vote for a person who’s never done anything bad? Do we actually want Harvey Milquetoast for premier? Beer taxes would probably climb faster than a mountain hiker with a grizzly bear in pursuit. You didn’t see good ol’ Ralphie raise liquor taxes, at least until he dried out. Ah, those were the days.
Arguably the most serious problem of all caused by attack ads is that they don't tell us anything about the parties that financed it, except that they don't like the other guy. Come on, people! We need a little more to go on! Maybe try something new; something revolutionary. Tell us your ideas… assuming you have some. Tell us what you believe… not what hot-button issue hit Twitter that day. Tell us what's really, really important to you… besides governing, that is. Then, when we find out what each party is planning for us, we can pick which party’s agenda most closely reflects our own hopes and beliefs and not our fears and biases.
The thing is that banning attack ads would be easy. Given that it's actually we, the taxpayers, paying for election ads, we should get a say in their civility. How about this; let's make a law so that you can only talk about your own policies and plans for your constituents. I don't want to hear your opinions on the other guys. I would much rather make up my own mind, thanks.
In fact, I’ve decided, if I see one single attack ad, I will refuse to vote for the party that paid for it, even if it means voting for ‘none of the above’. I’ll shut up now, before there are ads attacking me.