

Porter O'Brien's Post-Election Analysis

As we enter into a new political sphere, it's important to be able to understand key developments that New Brunswickers can expect to take place in the upcoming weeks. Fortunately, the experienced political team at Porter O'Brien is here to help guide you through what's next as New Brunswick welcomes in a new government, while looking at how we arrived here in the first place.

RESULTS IN BRIEF

With a strong lead from the start, the Liberals have managed to sway the public opinion in their favour despite the unpopularity of the federal party of the same name. New Brunswickers have called for change, in leadership, in healthcare, and in affordability.

Liberal leader Susan Holt won her home riding of Fredericton South-Silverwood by a wide margin of over 20 percentage points despite some thought that there would be a tight three race between top Higgs advisor Nicolle Carlin and Green candidate Simon Ouellette.

In other tight races, the Liberals were ultimately victorious, with Aaron Kennedy beating Premier Blaine Higgs in Quispamsis, Tania Sodhi beating Finance Minister Ernie Steeves in Moncton Northwest, and former MP John Herron beating controversial recruit Faytene Grasseschi in Hampton-Fundy-St. Martins.

Holt makes history as the first woman premier of New Brunswick.

One of the biggest shocks tonight was Blaine Higgs losing his own riding. He is the first premier to suffer this infamous fate since Richard Hatfield in 1987. However, Quispamsis and its predecessor riding King West have had a tradition as a perfect bellwether of provincewide results, the only exception having been Higgs' win there in 2014.

PRELIMINARY ELECTION RESULTS

Projected Seats

- New Brunswick Liberal Party - 31
- Progressive Conservatives - 16
- Green Party of New Brunswick - 2

Liberal Majority

With the New Brunswick Liberals winning 31 seats in the legislature, Susan Holt is premier-elect of New Brunswick, and will be sworn in along with her appointed cabinet in the next few weeks. She will become the first female premier in the history of the province.

Monday night's results mean that Premier Higgs and the Progressive Conservative Party of New Brunswick government have been defeated, and will be relegated to the role of Official Opposition after having secured just 16 seats. The Green Party saw limited success, winning just two seats.

The Liberals' win means that they will be able to begin implementing their policy agenda immediately after being sworn in, with relatively limited resistance to their goals and objectives. Expect a throne speech late this fall with action on their top priorities like eliminating provincial sales taxes on energy and new construction, and retention payments for healthcare workers.

CABINET SPECULATION

In addition to Susan Holt, the Liberal Party elected a number of high profile candidates on Monday night, some of whom she will select to form her cabinet.

John Dornan, the newly elected MLA for Saint John Portland-Simonds previously served as the CEO of Horizon Health, and is anticipated to be a senior cabinet minister, perhaps minister of health. Dornan represents a riding that was held for 25 years by former veteran MLA and minister Trevor Holder, suggesting that the riding's loyalties may have been with Holder and not the PCs.

René Legacy was re-elected to represent the people of Bathurst, a riding that has not elected a Progressive Conservative for over a century. Legacy was first elected in 2020 and has been a strong critic no matter the portfolio. A strong communicator in both official languages, look to see Legacy play a major role in the Holt cabinet, potentially as finance minister.

Francine Landry was re-elected yet again to represent the constituents of Madawaska Les Lacs–Edmundston. She once served as minister for Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour as well as the Minister of Economic Development during Brian Gallant's tenure as premier. Her support for Holt's leadership campaign was strong which positions her well for a cabinet appointment.

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Rob McKee is one of the young, talented MLAs re-elected to the legislature. Currently the finance critic, McKee is also a lawyer who can operate seamlessly in both official languages and is poised to play a significant role in this new government. He will undoubtedly be a member of cabinet with a high profile portfolio.

WHAT'S NEXT?

With the election concluded, the Government of New Brunswick enters into what is informally known as the “transition period”, the time between the conclusion of the election and the swearing in of a new government.

In coming weeks, key staff from the incoming government meet with staff from the outgoing government, and work together to prepare an orderly transition of power. Traditionally it takes two to three weeks.

During the transition period, Premier-designate Holt will select her new cabinet, and begin preparations for the swearing-in ceremony, which is conducted by the Lieutenant Governor.

Upon being sworn in, the new government will begin the 61st session of the legislature. The “Speech from the Throne”, a speech delivered by the Lieutenant Governor, signals the government’s priorities for its upcoming term.

Following the throne speech, the government will hold a brief fall sitting in the legislative assembly. This sitting typically happens in November or December, and is usually short. As the new government settles into its new role, they will begin working on how best to advance their policy agenda, with themes of healthcare and affordability set to be key pillars of the team’s agenda.

CAMPAIGN RECAP

As the costs of living rise and the healthcare system faces challenges, New Brunswick’s fall election was defined by promises to improve living conditions for the average New Brunswicker.

While Premier Blaine Higgs stoked fears of a Liberal-Green coalition and promised to keep building, Liberals and Greens campaigned for change in a bid to win control of the legislature for the next four years.

New variables had to be considered during this campaign: the redrawn riding boundaries, the right-leaning socio-cultural ideologies of the Progressive Conservatives, and the loss of a right-leaning vote split with the weakened People's Alliance Party.

Over the last few weeks, we saw what appeared to be a relatively low-intensity campaign. No "wow" moments and nothing that really jumped out at the electorate as something that would make or break the province.

Higgs' two per cent HST cut marked the highlight of his campaign, something his party announced before the election was officially called. Meanwhile, Liberal leader Susan Holt and Green Party leader David Coon both emphasized much-needed investments in the healthcare sector to help put the ship back on course.

In addition to commitments focused on healthcare, the Liberals and Greens both promised a permanent rent cap. To help ease the cost of living pain, Susan Holt promised to remove the provincial sales tax on new housing development projects and home heating bills, indicating that affordability was - predictably - top of mind for many.

Coon's major promise during the campaign was a commitment totalling \$1.05-billion to better train, recruit and retain healthcare professionals across the province. Mixed in with his other promises, his platform totalled just over \$4.05-billion, with the PC's in second at \$1.74-billion and Liberals close behind at \$1.29-billion.

After the departure of several PC cabinet ministers and MLAs over the premier's leadership style and controversial stances on issues like Policy 713, this election was a referendum on Blaine Higgs.

In closing, this election was one of, if not *the*, most pivotal provincial elections to date with New Brunswick facing multiple challenges. Ultimately, it was New Brunswickers who decided that the Liberals' vision appealed most to them and they will be sending Holt and her team to the New Brunswick legislature to form government.

LIBERAL PLATFORM RECAP

The core of the NB Liberals' platform is focused on healthcare and affordability. At the beginning of the campaign, they committed to creating 30 community care clinics in New Brunswick, quickly followed by the announcement of a universal school free breakfast and pay-what-you-can lunch program.

They've committed to removing the PST on electricity bills for residential customers and eliminating the current carbon adjuster, which they say would save the average New Brunswicker 4 cents a litre at the pumps. They've also committed to reforming property tax, implementing a 3 per cent rent cap, and building 30,000 new homes in New Brunswick by 2030.

Other than their promise to improve accessibility, their healthcare platform have a special focus on senior, women, and gender-diverse people, helping seniors stay in their homes for longer with more support and providing free contraceptives and one free round of IVF for women.

As for education, Holt is committing to retaining and recruiting educational professionals by improving their working conditions and increasing financial support for those entering the profession.

CONTACT US

With a diverse set of backgrounds and skills, our team is ready to support you and your organization with public relations, government relations, management, training, and more. We've supported hundreds of clients to achieve their goals; we can help you too!

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