

Dear Editor

John Gray had a chance to do something interesting ("Ottawa's Boy Scout," September 2005). He could have reviewed William Johnson's biography of Stephen Harper in the light of his own experience of writing a biography of Paul Martin, and perhaps provided us with some illumination about the biographer's craft. Instead, he used up his space venting his personal opinions about Harper.

I've never understood how reporters, whose trade is the manipulation of words, feel justified in passing sweeping judgements about the competence of people who actually do things, such as leading political parties. Rather than waste more time on Gray's words, let's look at Harper's deeds. *Im Anfang war die Tat!*

After winning the leadership of the Canadian Alliance in 2002, Harper reunified the Alliance by bringing back the caucus members who had left for a temporary flirtation with Joe Clark's Progressive Conservatives. In 2003, he brought about a merger of the Alliance with the PCs, something that all other leaders on the right had talked about but had never been able to carry through. Then, with almost no time to prepare, he led the new Conservative Party to substantial progress in the 2004 federal election, increasing its seat total from 73 to 99 (including 24 in Ontario) and bringing the Liberals down to an unstable minority.

Along the way he multiplied the fundraising potential of the Conservative Party. Whereas both the Canadian Alliance and the Progressive Conservatives struggled with financial difficulties, Harper's new party is beating the Liberals at the fundraising game. The Conservative Party raised \$4.9 million from 46,119 donors between April and June of this year, whereas the Liberals raised \$1.4 million from 8,521 donors in the same period of time.

What about the polls, where, according to Gray, the Conservatives are languishing? The most recent national poll I have seen is from Environics, with a sample size of 2,022, released July 28, 2005. In that survey, the Conservatives had 31 percent of national support, compared to 34 percent for the Liberals—not bad for the opposition in the middle of the summer.

Gray thinks Harper should be doing better. Maybe Tiger Woods should have won the U.S. Open and the PGA this year in addition to the Masters and British Open. Maybe Gray's biography of Martin should still be on sale in my local Chapters. Who knows? The only certainty is that journalists, like political scientists, are better equipped to write about what did happen rather than what didn't.

That's exactly what William Johnson has provided in his book—a careful, well-written account of Harper's career to date. Anyone who wants to know more about Harper and how he derailed Paul Martin's "juggernaut" (a term from another Martin biographer, Susan Delacourt) should read this book.

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