

THE ICEMEN COMETH...
Roger Matthews

OK, OK, not actual icemen. I think we've all had quite enough of once-in-a-century winter weather. But now we're all caught up in that once-in-a-Parliament season, there's an awful inevitability about the whole thing. Rather like the Tractor Beam in Star Wars, we're being drawn relentlessly towards the Great Date.

It's inescapable. Not a day goes by – or has gone by – without some new policy designed to make us all realise that, economy or no economy, Iraq War or not, politicians' expenses or not (and Steele and Warburton or not), the present incumbents are, all things considered, a pretty good lot.

And so it is that there is an atmosphere of unremitting zeal. Now unremitting zeal is not bad, as zeal goes. Given that hundreds of dentists and dozens of PCTs have clamoured to be part of the Steele "pioneer" pilots, it would be churlish not to have them commence just before the election is announced.

No matter that the preparatory work has not yet been signed off, that PCTs have not entirely committed to carrying the financial can if the piloteers should actually lose out financially, or that the precise parameters of the pilots haven't been finalised, April the First it is (or was)!!

And of course, April the first also marked the date when dental charges didn't rise (in England or Wales). Not that anyone bothered telling the dentists in England, or updating the charges posters and leaflets. It all just kind of didn't happen – but you can bet it will trip off many a prospective parliamentary candidate's lips when the time comes.

Unremitting zeal has also been apparent in a sudden determination to criminalise previously unheard of recreational drugs (causing yet further resignations from the Advisory Committee on Drug Misuse). There's no-one more zealous than a Home Secretary on the electoral trail.

Let's face it, there isn't much to separate the parties on the traditional dividers of the Economy (no-one telling the truth anyway); Immigration (confuse them with statistics) or even Education, Policing or Europe. I rather liked the recent description of two bickering front benchers as "two bald men fighting over a comb".

So, as dentistry has been described as one of the top three constituency health issues, we can look forward to ever more extravagant promises. Or commitments. I think a commitment is slightly more than a promise, but somewhat less than a policy.

Shall we have a return to registration in England and Wales? Some say that it is not only on the Opposition agenda, but may be hi-jacked by the Government. Typical. They spend four years trying to obfuscate all record of the pre-UDA era only to have another *volte face* and screw up all the statistics again. But perhaps that's the point?

Or maybe we will have not three but ten or fifteen UDA bands? Steele hinted that this would be a good idea, and now the Tories are proclaiming a breakthrough moment. Why stop at fifteen? We had two hundred until 2006, but re-arranging the chess pieces on the great board of Black (Government)- v- White (profession) will only lead to further frustration.

At the end of the day, the Icemen will always run the game. We are but pawns, given a set and self-obliterating role in the greater strategy. We can succeed, and even rejoice, in individual successes and health gains, but in the end, the outcome, on a grand scale, is pre-ordained.

[580 words]

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Notes to Editors:

Roger Matthews MA BDS DGDGP (UK) FDSRCS(Edin) - Chief Dental Officer

Roger joined Denplan in 1995 having spent 20 years working in general dental practice and as a dento-legal advisor for the Medical Defence Union. He oversees dental advice to the company and its links with professional bodies, and is responsible for Denplan's professional services.