



Chair's Column

The Telegram April 2, 2011

Vote. For yourself. For this province.

By Jo Mark Zurel

Whether it's a topic you avoid at the dinner table or the guilty pleasure you indulge in at the water cooler – everybody's got an opinion about politics and how to approach them.

Personally, I'm pretty aware of what's going on. I know the names and the faces – even a good bit of the history. But I know a lot of people who couldn't tell you the difference between Tories and Grits, let alone big "C" and little "c" conservatives.

But none of that really matters does it? We would all like engaged, aware voters to flock to the polls every time the writ is dropped, but that's not reality. From a Board of Trade perspective – even from my own personal perspective – all we can ask is that people just get out and vote.

Vote with your conscience. Vote the way your dad always did. Vote with your friends. Vote for the name that wins eenie, meenie, miny, moe. Please just vote.

Because whether politics is a passion for you, whether you roll your eyes at the election promises, or simply don't care who wins; at the end of the day it's your right and your duty. And it will have an impact on you.

I can't tell you how to vote – the Board of Trade doesn't even take sides – but both I and the Board will be involved. Throughout the campaign we'll be holding events and providing information for the public and our members so that when you do mark that X – for whomever – you'll be an engaged, aware voter.

Here are a few election topics that will have an impact here as a result of the election:

Electricity transmission

Intangible, unnecessary barriers have created a national imbalance between provinces that are lacking in energy assets, while others have a surplus.

Why it's important: A long-term, innovative plan for getting the most out of the country's energy assets means more stable and reliable energy at lower costs for everyone.

What we need: A clear, forward-looking national policy on energy, including infrastructure and energy transmission between provinces, as soon as possible.

Fisheries management

Better management of the Nose and Tail of the Grand Banks and the Flemish Cap could give us back a sustainable, economically-viable and culturally-important fishery.

Why it's important: This once-tremendously productive industry is still in trouble, although solid science, regulation and compliance could help rebuild fish stocks.

What we need: For Canada to take further action in fisheries management including reforming the Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Organization.

Deficit reduction and debt payment

This year's deficit and the future deficit projections are troubling. Balanced budgets are essential to economic health.

Why it's important: Federal debt will eat up \$33 billion this year. That is enough money to eliminate our province's debt, fund the entire Lower Churchill project, and build hundreds of schools and dozens of hospitals.

What we need: Balanced budgets sooner, including structural changes to the costs of government.

Federal decision-making presence in Newfoundland and Labrador

Federal decision-making – even regional decision-making – is more concentrated in places like Halifax and Moncton than in this province.

Why it's important: Federal decision-makers here can more easily understand our unique challenges, identify local opportunities, and be accountable for federal commitments. With federal decision-makers in the community, more 'made-in-Newfoundland and Labrador' solutions can be found for local issues.

What we need: Additional decision-making capacity in Newfoundland and Labrador will help further represent our needs and interests in the federal bureaucracy.

Arctic Gateway

Canada's Arctic is home to vast natural resources, new transportation routes and clearly define Canada's boundaries and jurisdiction.

Why it's important: The support services needed to access the north could naturally be provided by Newfoundland and Labrador, which is strategically located and has vast expertise in ocean technology.

What we need: A national Arctic Gateway strategy with this province in a lead role.

Marine Atlantic

Marine Atlantic is a \$200 million a year operation supporting \$10 billion in retail and wholesale trade in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Why it's important: Island residents could run out of food if the ferries stop running, but it's easy to forget that central Canadian economies were helped through the recent recession by this province's continued strong performance, including billions of dollars of goods moving via the ferry service.

What we need: Continued attention paid to the Island's 'road link' with the rest of Canada, and Canada's road link to our multi-billion dollar economy.

If any of these issues stood out to you, please go vote. Because if we go out and vote while the rest of Canada stays home, at least the folks in Ottawa will know we're paying attention. And that will get their attention.

Jo Mark Zurel is Chair of the St. John's Board of Trade.