



Chair's Column

The Telegram Sept. 10, 2011

PULL QUOTE: "If you don't read anything else in this column, just read this: it's your government and my government – politicians are simply the stewards and representatives, not the owners."

The choice is yours **By Jo Mark Zurel**

Choice is a funny thing. We make good ones, we make bad ones. We make personal ones, we make professional ones. We make minor ones, and we make ones that can't be reversed no matter how hard we try.

Next month we will be asked to make a choice about our province's future. Sounds simple, right? Well let me ask you this: do you vote for the candidate on your ballot or for the leader you support? Or, maybe, just for the party? Not quite as straightforward as you thought a moment ago. That's three choices wrapped up in one ballot by my count.

Three, of course, being the magic number of choices in the coming election. Three provincial parties, three candidates for Premier. We support rational, reasonable public debate in an open way. We should be able to have a conversation about the future of this province without being belittled, insulted or ignored.

And we equally should be able to have an accurate conversation. We have to let people express their opinion because opinion is what we have in a civilized democracy; we have rejected violence and might and brute strength as the way decisions get made. But when people are factually wrong, we need to say so. Fiction in governing creates problems in society.

Here's a quick and easy way to do that. When a politician tells you something, ask them to prove it.

"We have a plan for that."

"Oh, can I see a copy please?"

"That's a top priority for us."

"Well which of the following isn't? I ask because you can't have a lot of top priorities. So is it: health care, education, job creation, resource development, seniors care, roads, the fishery, forestry..."

Be polite with politicians – there aren't many people who want to go around from house-to-house and be treated poorly and then show up in the news being treated poorly so they shouldn't have to put up with rudeness. They are neighbours and friends and family members too. But they are looking to control laws and tax money and our future, so be firm and frank with them.

They are asking you to transfer those rights and responsibilities to them for 1,461 days. By the way, if current finances are any indication, government will spend on average just over \$20 million of our public money every day for those 1,461 days.

If you don't read anything else in this column, just read this: it's your government and my government – politicians are simply the stewards and representatives, not the owners.

The stewards of our economy are going to have millions of barrels of our oil to support public spending over the next four years. The stewards of our money are going to spend billions of our dollars over the next four years. The stewards of our society are going to make decisions that affect the life, health and education of over half a million people over the next four years.

We give them that right in a democracy. We demand responsibility in exchange.

The Board of Trade has issues it wants to push to the forefront, just like other groups do. Ours are straightforward: debt, demographics and diversification. Pay off our crippling debt, retain and attract our young people, and provide a range of opportunities so that we aren't too reliant on one industry. It's the same thing as you getting your credit under control, telling your kids that they should stick around, and teaching them how to hammer a nail, build a website and split an atom.

Let me conclude by saying this – the Board of Trade doesn't support any political party or candidate. That's what you do. But you have a right and a responsibility to get answers. So before you mark an X for a candidate, make sure you put a few check marks next to 'did they answer my question', 'will they represent my interests', and 'can they actually deliver'?

It makes the choice a whole lot easier.

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