

Personal responsibility, public accountability

"Christmas is a time when kids tell Santa Claus what they want and adults pay for it. Deficits are when adults tell the government what they want—and their kids pay for it."

Richard D. Lamm, US politician

By Jo Mark Zurel

Joining the St. John's Board of Trade was an opportunity for me. While networking and building relationships have been a valuable part of my membership, the real reason I joined the St. John's Board of Trade was to make a difference. To have some impact on the business climate and possibly, even the political and social environments my kids would inherit.

I believe we're at a time of great opportunity in this place. From this position, we can build a better, stronger, more robust city and province out of oil revenues and current successes.

My priority in all my roles - Junior Achievement, Red Cross, NLAN and Atlantic Provinces Economic Council – is to do better for the next generation. At the Board of Trade I will work diligently to give young business owners and their families the opportunities they deserve. I'm thrilled to be given this leadership role at such a shining moment. It's a substantial opportunity, and one I hope to make the most of. I'm confident that we can do great things together.

As a chartered accountant, I've got a few favourite points I like to harp on and I'd like to use this space to talk about some of them. Maybe use this column to change your mind about the dull worlds of finance and governance.

Perhaps even make some of those bigger topics relate to you and your household.

I've been talking a lot lately about how provincially, federally and even in our city, decisions are being made about what to spend our tax dollar on.

And while it's easy to point fingers at politicians and question whether their motives are the same as voters', perhaps we all need to look in the mirror first. No matter the level of government, politicians say they're working to create conditions to make our cities and provinces more prosperous, successful. Yet, the taxpayer keeps asking for more.

As residents we pressure the City of St. John's to give us better snowclearing, to provide curbside recycling and provincially we demand better roads, schools and hospitals. We do this without thinking about the trade-off. I don't deny the need for these services, **but taxpayers should also be pushing for governments to pay down debt, make wise investments and diversify for a better tomorrow.**

Why? Because in our households we place a high priority on investing for our retirements, making sure to pay off the credit cards and keep the cupboards from going bare. And when the kids start demanding iPods and laptops, we're willing to cut them off to save the family finances. Why can't we encourage our governments to do the same?

We all want to be prosperous and successful. None of us want to see our current quality of life reduced. But when we allow public debt to be racked up, that's exactly what we're doing.

A new car would generally be seen as an improvement to our quality of life. A new car payment is not. But because of our provincial debt, every Newfoundlander and Labradorian is on the hook for a loan for a nice new sedan, but none of us get a set of keys. Half a million people each paying a \$16,126 car loan and not a car between us. It's pretty serious stuff. We need to give government direction to pay down the debt and we need to back them up if they decide to do it.

By the way, federally, we have a second car payment, or per person debt of \$16,400. Two car payments, zero cars. It means that for my family of 5, we have 10 more car loans than we have cars. I'll leave you with a good ramble from the statesman Thomas Jefferson. He was on to something: "We must not let our rulers load us with perpetual debt. We must make our election between economy and liberty or

profusion and servitude. If we run into such debt, as that we must be taxed in our meat and in our drink, in our necessities and our comforts, in our labors and our amusements, for our calling and our creeds... [We will] have no time to think, no means of calling our miss-managers to account but be glad to obtain subsistence by hiring ourselves to rivet their chains on the necks of our fellow-sufferers... And this is the tendency of all human governments. A departure from principle in one instance becomes a precedent for [another]... till the bulk of society is reduced to be mere automatons of misery... And the fore-horse of this frightful team is public debt. Taxation follows that, and in its train wretchedness and oppression.”

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