

Voting for a new leader



By Nate Smelle

DURING THIS CAMPAIGN I've had the chance to get to know a few of the candidates on a personal level. Although my own political views clash with those of 50 per cent of the names on the ticket in Bancroft I like each of them individually as people. I also have great respect for their decision to stand up for what they believe in. In spite of my admiration this election?the most important and costly election in our nation's history?was not called for us to select new friends. It was called for us to elect a new government. Whether that government wears orange, green, red or blue is still up for us to decide.

Looking back on my own footsteps as I followed the candidates along the campaign trail there was one defining moment that solidified where my vote will land on election day came to me via my interview with incumbent Conservative MP Daryl Kramp. In this conversation he declared ?People have to decide, are they voting for the candidate, are they voting for the leader or are they voting for party, because people vote for different reasons.?

His statement resonated with me deeply since I had always cast my vote primarily for the leader. Thinking about what he'd said I asked myself why this was so.

Not belonging to any particular party I do my best to approach each election with a relatively fresh pair of eyes. I find this approach helps me to avoid bias, while allowing me to assess the different leaders, party platforms and candidates with a higher degree of objectivity. Paying closer attention to this election than any other I have taken part in before, I have come to realize that there is truly no good excuse to be an uninformed voter. All of the information we need to elect a fiscally, socially and environmentally responsible government and leader is available for us online, in print, on television and in person if we choose to actively engage with the issues that matter to us.

Some of the very first words I had published in Bancroft This Week back in spring of 2012 were found in a series of letters to the editor I wrote as a concerned citizen. These letters were a critique of the newly elected Harper government's Omnibus Bills C-38 and C-45. Outraged at how this legislation weakened our democracy and our ability to protect our natural resources it was at this point in time that I started to keep a closer eye on the fine print and to share these observations.

One of my main grievances with Bills C-38 and C-45?and the Harper government in general for that matter?is how it routinely ignores and dishonours its treaty obligations with indigenous peoples. Through this particular legislation alone long-standing environmental protection measures such as the Navigable Waterways Protection Act (NWPA) were completely eliminated. Prior to being trashed by the Harper government the NWPA was used to protect more than 2.5 million rivers and 40,000 lakes nationwide since 1882. Once Bill C-45 had been enacted only 97 lakes and 62 rivers remained protected, 90 per cent of which reside in strongly held conservative ridings.

Why any government anywhere?in this day and age of worldwide water shortages?would label the elimination of water protection laws a good thing was beyond my comprehension. Hundreds of billions of dollars has been spent around the globe in hopes of detecting the presence of water on Mars and other celestial bodies; yet we know there is good clean water keeping us alive here on earth and our so-called leaders consciously decide to weaken the legislation protecting this most valuable resource?

It didn't make sense then and it doesn't make sense now.

Because this current government is more concerned with promoting the tar sands and the Keystone XL pipeline than it is with protecting the Indigenous people who have lived on this same land long before the first barrel was extracted, I am voting for the party and the leader who I believe will put people and the planet before corporate profits. No matter how nice a candidate may be as a person, no matter what party your grandfather voted for, the leader you directly or indirectly approve of with your vote will set the tone for the next four years.

I am not alone in my hope for a change of tune on the federal level. Advance polls brought out a record number of voters eager to be a part of the change they desire. Many other prominent figures who usually remain silent in regards to federal politics in Canada are also speaking up. Admitting that he had never voted in a federal election before the fact that Assembly of First Nations, Chief Perry Bellegarde has called on Indigenous people across Canada to make their voices heard in this election says a lot and says it loudly. The three-way race between the NDP, the Liberals and the Conservatives indicates one thing for certain?the majority of Canadians want change. As much as I admire thought-provoking Facebook post or a clever Tweet the change Canadians are indicating they desire will not come by simply clicking a button.

The only way we can bring about this change is by heading down to the polling station on Oct. 19 and voting.