

Northeast Avalon Times May 2019

**Voting for none of the above
Birds I View
Bill Montevecchi**



The eye of the gannet. As gannets are vigilant for marauding coyotes at Cape St. Mary's, voters are assessing the political rhetoric. (photo: Bill Montevecchi)

Let's see - there's Muskrat Fall. There's the heavily subsidized open-pen aquaculture fiasco in Placentia Bay. But let's make the most of a bad situation and take the lesser of two evils. Surely not voting for the status quo is a crime against democracy. Or is it?

What if your vision and hope for all that is good and positive for our province just isn't out there on the political radar screen? Should you decide to vote for the lesser of two evils when your heart isn't in it? Should you vote for the status quo when the options are so skewed that you can't stay true to your convictions? Or is there a higher democratic calling?

To my mind – a vote is an endorsement. If you cannot endorse a party or their past activities which is a strong predictor of their future activities, then why take lesser evil? Why not hold out for good?

Voting levels in our province are often low. More than apathy is likely at play. Low voter turn-outs reflect a disengaged and disenfranchised electorate. Why isn't the public inspired, and why aren't people convinced by past government performances, or by the rhetoric and veracity of what they are hearing from politicians?

What politicians do matters. Yet campaign proposals appear vacuous on the basis of past deeds. The real and hidden costs of touted benefits are devastating. Can you really trust a government that bribes, patronizes and pork-barrels around the

province just before (and even after) they call an election? Do you really want to support cronyism and paternalism? Or is there a better way to govern?

It's our money with which politicians are entrusted to manage wisely, and it seems impossible for any party to do that. Pork barrelling is their most effective strategy in the short term, while ever-inflating deficits loom off in the future. When it's time to face the cancerous deficits head on, the perpetrators are no longer around to answer the call.

To decide not to vote for the status quo shouldn't be taken to mean that politicians are bad people, in fact they seem just as varied and variable as the rest of us. To decide to not vote for the status quo does not mean that politicians are not hard working individuals, best I can tell most all of them are extremely hard workers. What is missing is a realistically grounded environmental and economic perspective that can be trusted.

Deciding not to vote for the status quo will contribute to a building pressure to fill the credibility and responsibility void. And how might that void be filled? It seems to me with a sustainable environmental approach that fosters economic prosperity and social well-being. Let's address climate change head on with energy conservation (don't hear that from any party) and transition to renewable sources. And let's focus on fiscal conservatism in the short and in the long term. The absence of a basic sustainable strategy will only cause economic, social and environmental problems to worsen.

To decide not to vote for the status quo doesn't mean that you've given up on the democratic process or that you favor public apathy. Rather as a deliberate action, deciding not to vote for the status quo means that you envision and want better for our province. It is not an ideological search for the impossible, rather it is a conviction that things have to change and have to change radically.

Sustainable prosperity has to be our shared goal but the irresponsible economic policies being offered are eroding the very fabric and well-being of our society. My decision not to vote for the status quo is a determined one. I will cast my vote for change, for raising the bar, for a better Newfoundland and Labrador for every one of us. To cast that vote I will writing "none of the above" on my ballot.

Coyotes have returned to Cape St. Mary's

Coyotes have returned to the gannet colony at Cape St. Mary's. On a 4 May visit to Cape St. Mary's, Tony Power, Richard Elliot, Syd Cannings and I found 24 dead gannets scattered above their nesting cliffs. This is the first documentation of gannet kills by coyotes during spring. Previous kills included 68 birds found in September 2016 and 42 birds found last September.

The dead birds that we found in early May were dispatched, like those killed in 2016 and 2018, by bites to the back of the head and neck and cervical dislocation. But unlike previous kills in the fall, when three quarters of the carcasses were intact, all of the spring carcasses were eaten completely. Many had only the wings remaining.

Researchers and staff were present during the previous autumn kills and may be why the coyotes did not return to the dead uneaten birds. Staff and researchers were not present before the kills on 4 May, so maybe the coyotes were more likely to return to kills. We do not know. We do know that the carcasses from the September 2018 kills were removed over the winter by coyotes or other.

Coyotes kill the gannets at night under the cover of darkness. Gannets are large formidable birds with dagger-like beaks that can easily remove an eye or worse. At times foxes kill a gannet or two on the mainland cliffs, though they cannot reek the extensive kills that we are witnessing.

There is good evolutionary reason why seabirds nest on islands and on inaccessible cliffs. The coyotes are imposing pressures that wolves and other mammalian predators imposed in the past.

Birds in the Area

By mid-April, kittiwakes were pairing on the cliffs of the Rookery at Mistaken Point (Tony Power). They are on the cliffs at Witless Bay and Cape St. Mary's. The murrelets are rafting in huge aggregations and are making tenuous passes at the cliff faces. They will soon be mating on terra firma.

Osprey and snipe have returned. Richard Elliot spotted a windswept pine warbler on the cliffs of Cape St. Mary's on 4 May. I heard my first fox sparrow song on the misty morn of 20 April but haven't seen one in our yard yet. Gordon Butt has heard white-throated sparrows singing the "O Canada, Canada, Canada" odes.

On 18 April, 70 noisy pine siskins and some evening grosbeaks visited the maple trees by Neary's Pond (Carolyn Mayo).

Ignore the weather – spring is here.

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