

Paying attention to patterns



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By Nate Smelle

Every time I hear people talking politics during an election I feel a sense of hope. I get this feeling because unlike anything else I have experienced, elections have a uniquely transformational way of bringing out both the best and worst in us.

By the time the next edition of Bancroft This Week hits the stands the people of Ontario will have voted in their third election in the past 17 months. During this time there have been ample opportunities to educate ourselves regarding the issues, and what each party is offering to address them.

As usual there have been plenty of scandalous accusations and more promises made than could ever possibly be kept. Also par for the course, we have been told how this election is the most important one in our history, and that we are ready for 'change.' With every election that comes to pass these type of patterns become more evident to those paying attention. No matter how politically neutral one might be, by listening to the candidates explain to us how their party plans to: improve our health care and education; honour Indigenous rights and treaties; create jobs, grow the economy and end poverty; tackle climate change and heal the planet, we in turn are forced to confront where we personally stand on these issues.

With the Thanksgiving weekend taking place so close to election day, many of us recently had the chance to develop a better understanding of our own position by discussing and debating our stance with our family and friends around the dinner table. When we talk with our loved ones about the state of politics, the issues, our options we soon find that no matter how deep our differences might be, we all share some common ground. The conversation leading up to this consensus may be tense and even painful at times, however, once common ground is established the dialogue always evolves and progress is made. Conversations like these are a testament to what makes a democracy strong 'the power of the people to participate.'

At the same time after recently speaking with random people on the street about the 2019 election, I also noticed that there appears to be a growing number of individuals who have decided to stay home this time around. The most common reason for their decision not to participate in the democratic process that I was given is that they believe it doesn't really matter who you vote for because 'they are all the same.'

As far from the truth as this statement may be, it sadly reflects the beliefs held by a significant portion of our population. While each of the leaders and candidates are operating within the same political system 'a system many say is rigged to prop up a status quo that profits the few at the expense of the many' it is worth noting how the definition of progress varies according to each party. For some it will be defined in terms of dollars, jobs and bottom lines, for others it will be defined in terms of our personal/ecological health and overall quality of life. How each party intends to lead us down the path towards their own understanding of progress is where each of our options differ 'and where we need to focus our attention. When we overlook these differences and scoop all politicians into the same pot we do so at our own peril, because we neglect the fact that every elected official has the opportunity to

stay true to the values they profess during the campaign. This may be a rare occurrence but it does happen on occasion. While voter apathy may serve some parties well, we have learned time and time again that it does not serve the best interests of the majority of Canadians. The high level of political engagement we find ourselves at during an election campaign must not disappear after all the ballots are counted on Oct. 21. In fact that is when we need to step up our attention to ensure that our next government, whomever that may be, makes good on the promises that put them into office.