



Candidates Need to Give us Something More to Pin our Hopes on This Election

Reading the national media's coverage of the NB election this weekend was more than a little deflating and frustrating to me as stories about chocolate milk being the election issue proliferated mainstream media. To be candid, my first thought was SERIOUSLY? Followed closely by an image of the scene from the movie *A Few Good Men* where Col. Jessup (Jack Nicholson) says to Lt. Kaffee (Tom Cruise) *"Please tell me you have something more Lt...Please tell me their lawyer hasn't pinned their hopes to a telephone bill."*

Granted, the national media is seeking unique news angles and all too often they highlight the (seeming) incongruity of some of the things we do here in Atlantic Canada comparative to the larger centres. But when only a few short months ago we were referred to as an example of the "perils of decline" (*Globe and Mail*, May 3, 2018), you can understand why it is my sincere hope that candidates have something more to pin our hopes and votes on than chocolate milk.

Now I don't disagree that nutrition in our schools is important. We should be concerned about what is available to our children when we are not present to guide their food choices. But when every one of our economists in the province are consistently telling us we have very serious issues and challenges ahead of us, and that we need real change to reverse our current (and potentially dire future) economic trajectory—then we need to hear candidates explain their plans to address these issues if they are to be elected.

Historically, people want to see real change, and election after election we hear campaign slogans and promises of 'change' or that parties are offering something different—statements clearly meant to inspire hope and garner votes. Yet the only change New Brunswickers witness is a change of parties and then the cycle of governing to ensure re-election begins again.

Of course, politicking is to be expected during elections. But how about for a 'change' we make this election about focusing on the future, our challenges and a comprehensive plan to address them. Let's not focus on the past, that's not where we are headed and it's irrelevant.

Help voters make informed choices by telling us exactly how you plan to bring new people to the province, how you will attract new businesses and help existing businesses scale up their operations, how you will fix the broken worker's compensation program, how you will stem the detrimental effects of rising costs (business and personal taxes, property taxes, carbon tax, minimum wage hikes), how you will manage rising health costs while addressing the family doctor shortage and escalating wait times for care, how you will help improve our children's education outcomes that continue to lag behind other provinces, how you will reduce red tape and increase government efficiencies to remove barriers to business growth, how you will find a balance between environmental and economic sustainability, and how you will create conditions to help manage uncertainty around potential changes to NAFTA. These are just a few of the issues upon which New Brunswick voters need to hear your plans.

Our challenges are not new. We have known for some time we need to attract new people, jobs, businesses, and markets for export—all while getting our costs and fiscal house in order. Also, it will not come as a surprise to anyone that we have an aging and shrinking working population available to pay for the growing demand on public services—another fact economists have been voicing for some time.

There is so much about New Brunswick I love, and through our network of 38 Chambers and 5,600 businesses across the Province, the Atlantic Chamber of Commerce continues to promote growth and prosperity. I also know we have very strong policies on children's wellness and that I like chocolate milk as much as the next person, but I believe we should demand more 'leadership' from our leadership candidates.

Change isn't easy, but we need to face some tough realities to right the ship, which requires our candidates to lead, to stand in the discomfort of the moment and have a real conversation about their plans to address the critical issues facing our province and our future, and ultimately to provide a vision we can get behind. Because from a voter's perspective, uninformed decisions usually lead to poor outcomes. We can't afford that in this election.

Please tell us you have something more...that you haven't pinned our votes on the issue of chocolate milk.

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