

A lesson on pole vaulting

Even rational people, or people who claim to be rational that is, can sometimes lose all semblance of sanity. That could very well have happened to some of our nation's self-proclaimed saviours.

Those people we call political analysts and those we know as political reporters, have been consumed by the flames of a raging inferno — one that stands to engulf all rationale that stands in its way. That inferno is the public opinion poll craze. It's a craze that caught fire in 1984, and has since wiped out half of this nation's political landscape. It has to be controlled before the entire political arena has been gutted.

I'm not quite certain what has happened to cause the barrage of public opinion sampling, but something has. That something has caused politicians and especially journalists to go way overboard in their use of polls to analyse political issues and trends.

What's happened to our beloved country lately? Everywhere you turn you find public opinion polls staring you in the face. No front page is complete without a public opinion poll rating everything from the government's stance on free trade to which party leader has the nicest skin tone.

We have been saturated with polls in the

last little while, and the barrage is approaching lunacy. Whose fault is it? Is the government to blame, or is the media?

One suspects it is a combination of both. Maybe it's Mulroney's obsession with his public image that has triggered the media's idiotically regular commissioning of polls. Actually, at this stage it's really not what spawned the disease that matters, but rather how to cure the patient.

Polls have lost all their significance with the recent flood we've experienced. Once a week we're updated about Tories trailing Liberals, Liberals leading Tories, and the Argos leading John Turner in personal popularity. Every other day Angus Reid tells us that Westerners like free trade, 46 per cent of Quebecers hate Westerners, and 76 per cent of Torontonians don't know where Kalamazoo is.

Then Michael Adams and Environics tell us that 39 per cent of all Canadians like Brian Mulroney's hair, while 66 per cent of those surveyed think the free trade talks would go better if Mulroney brushed his teeth thrice daily instead of twice.

If this isn't making sense any more (did it ever?), then that's because to me, public opinion polls no longer make any sense.

It used to be that polls rating the three federal parties came out once a month and gained prominence only during election time. Now they come out weekly, and brainless media people treat them like scoops, placing them on the front page.

While this type of poll can mean something on a monthly basis near election time (to serve as a monitor on what we think), the use of polls for that purpose now is only to sell papers and stuff the pockets of the people who own these polling conglomerates.

These nouveau riche pollsters respond by polling Canadians on everything from acid rain to the role of banana cream pie in the Legislature. The saturation of polls has not only rendered them meaningless, but has also made them an incredibly frustrating addition to every paper and every newscast. This winter, there will be added meaning to using newspapers to start the fireplace when I hold the matches.

Why all this grumbling and no solution you ask? It's coming.

Let's suppose we send the pollsters to the poles. Not the polls — the poles. As in North and South. They'll have a field day.

They'll question penguins on the usefulness of icebergs when icebergs cause ships to sink.

Carey Nieuwhof

(Pollsters love to ask leading questions that are loaded with left-lib rhetoric). They'll question Arctic Terns on how international peacekeeping forces can keep back hostile wind currents to enable more efficient migration.

Polar bears will be probed on the effectiveness and efficiency of this year's snow falls.

Perhaps the greatest thing we will gain is watching the pollsters realize that their craft is useless. No mone will be there to react. There are no reporters there to gobble up the stats. No politicians will respond. The animals will merely gaze blankly back and waddle away.

The pollster will realize that unlike the scientist, his information means nothing. He cannot do anything constructive with it. It is nothing but irrelevant information gathering. It is of no lasting value. Finally, these men will realize the absolute futility of their trade.

Back at home, we can have the chance to relax and watch the real news. Come election time, it may be appropriate to call one pollster back, and allow him to do one poll three weeks before the election. Then, it's time for him to go back on assignment. Where? To the poles, naturally.

An insider's recommendations

Part two of a brace of columns dealing with that cliff-hanging, fraught-with-excitement topic, municipal election reforms.

Hello, are you still there? Ok, eyes down for a full house. Or a full Legion hall, school hall, Knights of Columbus hall, or anywhere you gentle readers choose to cast or not cast, your vote. Every three (used to be two) years.

Bernard Grandmaitre, Minister of Municipal Affairs, in his sweeping reforms would have all of us municipal councillors, mayors, etc. declare all sources of election revenue with a maximum limit of \$750 from each person or company. **I am in big trouble.**

I've racked my brains sideways Bernard, but all I can come up with is 14 or 15 years ago when I first ran for council. This was an unconditional offer of \$1.37 from my Grade 5 son's chipped pink piggy bank, which, although I declined with thanks, should be recorded. So I'm making a clean breast of it now.

Bernard is disappointed with recounts, and lack of opportunity at election times for visible minority groups - no problem.

Allow six weeks from voting day to an-

nouncing day, the ballots are not going anywhere, or the people. Why the frenzy?

You employ Chinese with an abacus to count. Count, and recount, the recounts. If you have ever paid the bill at a Chinese restaurant where an abacus was used you will know they are infallible in the right hands (or left) and you can't get any more minority than that, can you? I mean how many Chinese abacus's are there?

LOW VOTER TURN OUT

Bernard's answer to that is a step in the right direction (well more of a shuffle really): Move voting day from November to October. Well it has been shuffled once, from December to November. This was so the car doesn't freeze solid when you pop in and put down the crosses in sub-zero wind chill weather.

But why not go the whole hog and make it decent weather? In late May for example, to celebrate the rites of spring, or early September when the kids are back to school and it's still (hopefully) shorts weather.

With three years warning, like Expo, a local service club could organize a giant parade

and street carnival. Coke and Pepsi would fall over each other to supply balloons. Baby kissing contests are always better in the open air, and Tide or All would supply soap boxes just for the advertising value.

We could then declare on our expense sheet, One soap box, two bagpipes, three balloons, four babies and five eyeshades with Adidas on the front, and so on.

This would not guarantee more votes cast but it would guarantee more turnout. After all Bernard, you can lead a horse to water, etcetera.

Right now the only way to guarantee wholesale turnout is a combination of perfect weather and Hulk Hogan coming to town.

DOWN UNDER

In Australia where everything is upside down, voters had to vote, the law said so. And being lawabiding, turn out they did. But in that final moment of truth, the second you get behind the screen, there were more spoiled ballots than you could shake a boomerang at.

So much for compulsory voting, except in South America, of course, where by the

Ray Baker

miracle of painstaking hand counts it can be shown that 115 per cent of everyone voted, even before the polls opened.

You see Bernie, if I may be so bold, and you can call me Ray, let's not lose sight of one thing. Whether the voter turnout is 90 per cent, 10 per cent if it averages 44 per cent across the province, the thing is this:

We are not discussing machines here, not Big Blue or red, or green or whatever. We are talking local non-party municipal elections.

And, when the issues are raised, and the chips are down, Mister and Missus, Master and Miss Public have a fundamental right that the bureaucratic quagmire of all political legislators in Ontario has overlooked.

The right to decide not to vote at all.

So be it.

THIS WEEK'S QUOTE. "Ok boys, drinks are on the house. And don't forget to vote for me." Saloon scene from every western movie made from 1938-1958.

Ray Baker and his family live in Penetanguishene. He is a freelance writer, a member of council, and either votes or doesn't vote at the Legion hall.

Letters

Thank you Huronia District Hospital

Dear Editor,

I would greatly appreciate if this letter could be printed in your editorial section of your paper, to let the people of you community know what a great facility they have in your "Huronia District Hospital".

My four-year-old son was admitted there, 2 weeks ago. From the ER receptionist, right

on through to our checkout 3 days later, he received a quality of care that could not have been surpassed.

This was the sixth hospital that we have dealt with, with our son, (most of them Toronto area hospitals) and he never received any care like he got at your town's hospital.

There was never one "sour apple" among all the doctor's, nurses, lab technicians, clerk's, etc. that we dealt with.

The people of Midland and area should be both thankful and proud to have such an outstanding health-care facility in their community.

Thank you.

Appreciation for telling story

Dear Editor,

Please accept the sincere thanks of the Midland Corps of The Salvation Army for telling the story of Experience House, which we plan to open October 1st of this year for homeless North Simcoe males, 16 - 25.

We are already working with a number of clients, one of whom which has been sleeping in a van at night because he has no

permanent home or job.

Experience House thanks those who have already offered their volunteer services, cooks, tutors, resource people, etc.

We also thank Walter Ens of St. Andrews Centennial Manor for donating nine beds to Experience House.

The support of our temporary housing shelter has received to date is heartwelm-

ing, proving that faith in others is never so beautiful as when it has its "working clothes" on.

Again, many thanks for telling your valued readers about Midland Salvation Army's Experience House.

Cordially yours,
Douglas Reed
Project Co-ordinator

We invite our readers to express their views on subjects of personal interest.

This newspaper reserves the right to edit all material submitted for space, grammar and legal restrictions.

Please include name, address and phone number of writer with article.

Thank you

Dear Editor,

On behalf of Heritage Penetanguishene, I would like to express our sincere thanks to all of those volunteers who assisted us in our recent Angels tag day. The success of our drive was due to the hours and enthusiasm which all our "taggers" displayed. Without you, we could not have achieved our goal.

Yours sincerely,
Michelle Quealey
Chairperson,
Heritage Penetanguishene

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Member



Member

Letters

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