



The Brief

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L'Italien says voters "coming home" to NDP : Erin Steuter debunks Will forestry determine undecided vote? : fake news

By DALLAS MCQUARRIE



Rosaire L'Italien, NB NDP interim leader, speaking to CUPE NB members at their convention in Fredericton in April. CUPE NB passed a resolution to endorse the NB NDP. Photo from the NB NDP.

A recent Corporate Research Associates (CRA) poll shows surging support for the New Brunswick New Democratic Party in the province. The poll, taken from February 7 to March 1 this year, is the first public opinion survey since Dominic Cardy resigned as NDP leader on January 1 and promptly joined the Progressive Conservative Party of New Brunswick.

NDP Interim Leader Rosaire L'Italien says the poll shows that many NDP members and supporters who were dissatisfied with Cardy voted for the Green Party in 2014 and are "coming back home to the NDP" now that he has left. He dismisses Cardy's tenure as NDP leader as a "failed experiment" in moving the NDP to the political right and says the party can now "get back to its true social democratic values."

This poll lends credence to L'Italien's analysis. Compared with a previous CRA poll in November 2016, the March 2017 poll shows that NDP support nearly doubled, from 7% to 12%, coming hard on the heels of Cardy's departure while support for the New Brunswick Green Party declined sharply from 9% to 5%.

The poll also shows that the NDP has fully recovered from a slump in support. At stake is whether voters seeking change will see the NDP or the Green Party as the alternative to the Irving-dominated Liberal and Conservative parties in the 2018 provincial election.

According to the CRA, Premier Brian Gallant and his Liberal government now have the support of 51% of decided voters, down 2% from November 2016, while support for the Conservatives and their new leader, Blaine Higgs, remained stagnant at 30%. Meanwhile, 31% of the electorate remains "undecided."

L'Italien says the NDP is continuing to pick up steam as it refocuses on issues like "good jobs, fair wages and a social safety net that protects everyone." He sees "a real hunger for change in New Brunswick," and states that, while the NDP's internal rebuild has only just begun, "we are seeing a big increase in people signing up and getting involved."

L'Italien says many of the people returning to the NDP are working people who traditionally supported the party but rejected Cardy's attempts to move the party to the right. Those voters, he says, are now returning because the party is once again seeking a better deal for working people, including improved labour standards and good jobs.

L'Italien is also hopeful that the next NDP leader will be "a new kind of politician who works for people and not the corporate sector." He says that while corporations do create many jobs, government job creation efforts in New Brunswick have too often concentrated on the welfare of the corporate sector at the expense of a fair deal for the citizens of the province.

The NDP has not yet set a date to select its next leader. The selection of a new leader may well determine whether the party continues gaining momentum in the months ahead.

L'Italien is enthusiastic about the NDP's preparations in individual ridings for next year's election. "We're working the whole field, and we'll have an active group working in each of

the province's 49 ridings," he says, adding that disgruntled Liberals and Conservatives are also joining the party.

The Green Party, meanwhile, reports the establishment of two new riding associations, the restructuring of 13 others, and a significant increase in fundraising. The election of Green Party leader David Coon in 2014 gave the party its first ever elected member in the provincial legislature and made Greens a visible presence on New Brunswick's political stage.

Hampering the Green Party is the fact that it does not have the established network of on the ground contacts and active riding associations that the NDP has developed over the years. The Greens began the process of nominating candidates for 2018 with David Coon's nomination on February 2, while the NDP will wait until its new leader is in place before beginning its candidate nomination process.

The issue of forestry may well determine whether it is the Green Party or NDP that will be perceived as the party of change in 2018. Banning both clearcutting and the spraying of cancer-causing glyphosates are twin pillars of the Green Party's promised Forest Sustainability Act. Successive Liberal and Conservative governments have allowed ever more clearcutting and conversion of natural forest to tree plantations.

The NDP talks about "strong regulatory oversight," and is only willing to promise an "independent scientific agency" to oversee forest management. That policy may be seen by environmentalists and others as an attempt to dodge taking a stand on the issues of clearcutting and spraying.

The Green Party has already presented petitions in the provincial legislature with 28,000 signatures demanding an end to the spraying of forests with dangerous glyphosates. It will continue to champion forest management that is focused on sustainable, long-term job creation.

Scientific research shows that clearcutting kills jobs in the long run, reduces and pollutes sources of fresh water, makes climate change worse, and robs future generations of their heritage. Making a scandalous situation even worse, areas that have been clearcut are sprayed with glyphosates to prevent natural forest from re-growing.

The World Health Organization reports that glyphosate is a chromosome disrupter, damages DNA, and likely causes cancer. Earlier this year, it was revealed that Monsanto and the American Environmental Protection Agency conspired to suppress evidence that glyphosates cause cancer. Those revelations effectively destroyed the last shred of credibility of the Gallant government claims that forest spraying is "safe."

Opposition to clearcutting and spraying forests with dangerous glyphosates is increasing. Whether the Greens or the NDP can be seen as the party of change in next year's provincial election may well hinge on which party offers the more credible alternative to current forest management plans which amount to little more than a bargain basement clearance sale of New Brunswick's natural heritage.

Dallas McQuarrie writes for the NB Media Co-op from Kent County.

By SOPHIE M. LAVOIE

"A lie can travel halfway around the world before the truth can get its boots on," opened Erin Steuter in her talk, "Fighting Fake News: Tips for Aspiring Truth Detectives," hosted by the NB Media Co-op in Fredericton on March 25. The quote is attributed to different sources and speaks to how easy fake news can spread.

Steuter, a professor of Sociology at Mount Allison University in Sackville, studies the media, including its coverage of the "War on Terror" and the monopoly media ownership in New Brunswick.

She began by examining exactly what she considers fake news and defined it as "fabricated news story intended for us to think is real," saying that most of these "stories" were constructed as "click bait," which are misleading sensationalist stories often geared toward getting clicks on websites. These are often also sponsored (paid for) content, which is generally required to be identified but hard to spot in the "deluge of media" coming across our screens. According to Steuter's sources, right now, 75% of ad revenue for *The Atlantic* and 50% of *Slate* comes from sponsored content.

Steuter also identified fabricated journalism, stories where "journalists that made it all up" and cited some notorious stories, including "Hack Heaven" by Stephen Glass.

Another complicating factor online is satire, which parodies mainstream journalism, like *The Manatee*, which has made a name for itself in New Brunswick.

Along with the true fabricated stories, what has happened in recent months are accusations such as characterizing news that is critical of certain political ideas as "fake," usually done by politicians like U.S. President Donald Trump. This type of accusation has led to the use of words such as "truthiness," used by comedian Stephen Colbert to describe politicians' preference for stories, which they "wish were true" rather than "really true." The other expression that has arisen is "post-truth," an adjective chosen as word of the year for Oxford Dictionaries in 2016, that means "relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief."

Steuter went on to list some of the real-world consequences of this type of made-up news, which she sees as creating conflict, such as in the case of Germany New Year's Eve news about a church mobbed by Muslims. This also manufactures antagonists and fuels fear, especially from racialized groups, which has a direct impact on people's lives and spoils community relations. Ultimately, it also creates misunderstandings and can change public opinion.

Steuter cited the "Trans Mountain Pipeline" opinion piece by Duane Bratt, a political science professor from Mount Royal University, that stated "there has never been a spill or leak along the Trans Mountain Pipeline" when the company's own website contradicted that.

Fake news perpetuates ignorance of the facts, according to Steuter. Getting people to not believe real things leads, in the long run, to "no one know[ing] what's really true," something that is increasingly heard. This, in turn, leads to a troublesome declining trust in the news media. Steuter quoted American journalist Ira Glass who "bemoaned the lack of influence of journalism" in society, because without journalism, who will keep politicians in line?

For the rest of this article and part 2 of this story that discusses tips on how to detect fake news, visit: nbmediacoop.org.

Sophie M. Lavoie is an editorial board member of the NB Media Co-op.



Dozens of people filled Conserver House in Fredericton to hear Erin Steuter speak on fake news on March 25, 2017. Photo by Sophie M. Lavoie.

Are Fredericton taxpayers subsidizing a “fake clinic”?

By SUSAN O'DONNELL



Fredericton Youth Feminists gather for a group shot outside Clinic 554 following their counter-protest of the anti-choice “March for Life” march in Fredericton on May 14, 2015. Photo by Tracy Glynn.

The Government of New Brunswick has granted a property tax exemption to a company and property owned by Fredericton anti-choice campaigners. The tax exemption is a subsidy that during the last five years alone was worth more than \$30,000 in lost tax revenue for the city of Fredericton.

The owner of the property that housed the Mother and Child Welcome House on Brunswick Street is a numbered company, 030822 N.B. Ltd., c/o Mother and Child Inc., with a registered address on Charters Settlement Road. The company directors are anti-choice campaigners Thaddée Renault, Suzie Ryan and Peter Ryan, the former executive director of the New Brunswick Right to Life Chapter.

Operating from their tax-free property, the Mother and Child Welcome House (now the Women’s Care Centre) has been reaching out to women who are pregnant or think they might be pregnant. They claim to provide free counselling, ultrasounds and pregnancy testing. However, the Mother and Child Welcome House/Women’s Care Centre, run by the New Brunswick Right to Life Chapter, is known in the pro-choice activist community for not providing accurate information on the full range of medical choices available to pregnant women, including abortion.

The Abortion Rights Coalition of Canada alleges that fake clinics “try to give the impression they are secular medical clinics run by professionals, when most are staffed solely by volunteers with no credentials or professional training in counselling. Alarming, the vast majority of fake clinics provide misinformation or withhold information from women.”

The property that houses the Mother and Child Welcome House/Women’s Care Centre is right next door to Clinic 554, a real health clinic that offers comprehensive medical care, including abortions and counselling about all the health and medical choices available to pregnant women. In the past, the Mother and Child Welcome House/Women’s Care Centre has provided a gathering space for anti-choice protesters

who have harassed women seeking health services at the neighbouring Morgentaler Clinic (now Clinic 554).

Valerie Edelman, Manager of Clinic 554, explained that on several occasions patients called her to book an appointment for an abortion after going to the Mother and Child Welcome House / Women’s Care Centre that advertises “Free Ultrasounds.” Said Edelman: “Every time a woman called me after going there, they were in tears. The encounters in the anti-choice building were filled with shaming and incorrect medical information, such as abortions increasing the risk of breast cancer.”

The New Brunswick Right to Life Chapter is staunchly anti-choice and anti-abortion. Most recently, the organization has spoken out against the provincial government’s decision to make the abortion pill Mifegymiso free to pregnant women. The government has stated that financial barriers should not stand in the way of a woman’s right to choose although there are still many barriers for women who want to access abortions, especially in rural areas. However, the New Brunswick Right to Life Chapter’s executive director Heather Hughes has stated publicly that she is distressed that the province is helping women who want to end their unwanted pregnancies.

In April, Hughes made an application to Fredericton City Council for permission to construct a new building on their downtown Brunswick Street property. Their previous building was destroyed by fire in 2016 and, since then, the Women’s Care Centre has been operating in temporary offices on Carleton Street. The plans for their proposed two-story building include spaces for counselling and watching videos. The City’s review of the planning application notes that the building uses are: “(a) medical clinic, counselling services and offices.”

The city’s Planning Advisory Committee (PAC), approved a zoning variance for the property that run counter to the city’s

municipal plan for greater density but was recommended by City staff. The proposed building will be smaller than by-laws currently allow. The variance was moved by Ward 10 Councillor John MacDermid. Regarding the property tax exemption for 562 Brunswick Street, MacDermid said: “Property taxes are under the exclusive jurisdiction of the province and the City of Fredericton has no say in who does and does not qualify for tax free status.”

The company owned by the anti-choice campaigners, 030822 N.B. Ltd., applied for and was granted an exemption from property taxes under the New Brunswick Assessment Reduction Program (ARP). The ARP can grant full exemption from property taxes to eligible non-profit organizations. To be eligible, the property owners must provide services to the community and must benefit one or more of the following: relief of poverty, services to youth, services to the elderly, or services to the disabled or disadvantaged. In addition, the primary services on the property must be funded to a considerable extent by donations and volunteer efforts.

The New Brunswick Right to Life Chapter describes its services as follows: “To promote the sanctity of all human life from fertilization to natural death through public education. To advocate for the right to life of the preborn, the disabled, the infirm and the elderly who are all uniquely created by God.”

Applications for exemption from property taxes are made on an annual basis, with a deadline of September 30. The ARP review committee includes representatives from Service New Brunswick (SNB), the Department of Finance, and the Department of the Environment and Local Government, on behalf of the Director of Assessment.

There is no list available to the public that identifies which properties are receiving a reduction. Information can only be obtained by reviewing the SNB Property Assessment roll online. The assessment roll records available online show that since 2013, the company owned by the anti-choice campaigners has paid no taxes on its property at 562 Brunswick Street. In 2013, the building was assessed at \$275,600. In that year, the usual tax assessment on a building of that value would be almost \$8,000. The vacant lot is currently assessed at \$88,300, and, again in 2017, it is also exempt from property taxes.

By contrast, the owners of the building next door, 554 Brunswick (Clinic 554), have paid more than \$91,900 in property taxes since 2013. According to Edelman, “Clinic 554 pays its taxes. We are part of the community and appreciate the opportunity to contribute.”

Dr. Adrian Edgar, Medical Director of Clinic 554, has made his facility a safe space that provides patient-centred and patient-driven care to the Fredericton community. He noted that the Mother and Child House / Women’s Care Centre that operates from the property next door is staffed by unqualified professionals. Instead of financing it, he would like the City of Fredericton invest in quality evidence-based healthcare. Fredericton was recently chosen the pilot site for introducing midwifery into the province. Dr. Edgar suggested that the City could purchase the property currently owned by the anti-choice campaigners and sell it to the Horizon Health Network so that the midwives who will be coming to Fredericton can turn the property into a birthing centre.

Reproductive Justice New Brunswick (RJNB) has been drawing attention to the disruptive activities of the Mother and Child House on Brunswick Street since 2014. Responding to the information about the property tax exemption, RJNB Spokesperson Allison Webster said: “RJNB is incredibly disappointed to see that while patients are still forced by the province to pay out of pocket for abortion services at a safe, professional and compassionate medical clinic, a duplicitous ‘fake clinic’ providing lies and manipulation is granted a tax-free existence.”

Susan O’Donnell is a researcher and writer based in Fredericton.

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Stop Spraying NB (SSNB) is selling maple syrup at \$8/bottle. Funds raised support the goal of stopping forest spraying in New Brunswick. Maple syrup can be bought at Conserver House (180 St. John St. in Fredericton) or by emailing Caroline at carolinelubbedarcy@gmail.com.