

Bill Rea ? Women on bank notes is fine

There's an important rule in life that I've never heard preached, but I think it should be.

Never be afraid to change your mind.

It sounds so basic, I can understand why some people might overlook it.

I sometimes get a little upset when a big fuss is made because an elected official changes his or her mind. Many people, especially some in the media (I have probably been guilty of it a couple of times) tend to accuse them of being inconsistent ? the term ?flip-flop? is often heard. The fact is people (politicians are people too, you know) will take a position on an issue, based on the information they have at the time. But as more info becomes available, the smart people adjust their opinions accordingly. And as I stated above, I don't think there's anything wrong with that. In fact, I think it would be wrong to discourage people from changing their minds.

There are some ideas I thought were dumb when I first heard them. But after a bit of reflection and sober second thought (I'd make a great senator), things start to make a bit more sense.

I had feelings like that last week, when I first heard that Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announce that there will be a new version of Canadian bank notes coming out in 2018, and there will be women depicted on them.

He made the announcement to coincide with International Women's Day, and at first, I was inclined to think it was another pointless gesture that politicians come up with to try and get the favour of certain segments of society. I have never heard anyone complaining about the people whose pictures are currently on our money. Besides, we already have a woman on our currency; namely Queen Elizabeth. In fact, for a good portion of my life time, the Queen's face was the only one we saw on currency, although we used to come across (and still do) old coins that predate her accession to the throne. Probably unlike a lot of you, I still remember the bill design that was dated 1954.

That changed some years ago, when we started seeing the pictures of former prime ministers on bank notes. I think we have grown used to seeing Sir Wilfrid Laurier on the \$5 bills, Sir John A. Macdonald on the 10s, William Lyon Mackenzie King on the 50s and Sir Robert Borden on the 100s. In terms of bank notes, that's all we have in Canada. There was a time when there was a \$1,000 bill, but they have been out of circulation for some time.

When I first heard about this idea, I wondered what was wrong with the people already depicted on the bills. As far as the prime ministers are concerned, it seems to me there is a balance. There are two Conservatives and two Liberals represented. Canada's first prime minister is there, as well as the first French-Canadian PM. The other two just happened to be the men who led the country through the two World Wars.

If you're just going to have prime ministers and the monarch on the bills, that's sort of going to exclude women. There has only been one woman serve as Canada's prime minister, and Kim Campbell was never elected to the post (for what it's worth, I did vote for her).

But where is it said that it has to be restricted to prime ministers?

In the United States, presidents tend to dominate their currency, but there are exceptions. Alexander Hamilton's face appears on the \$10 bills and Benjamin Franklin is on the \$100s. No reason why we Canadians should consider ourselves under such restrictions when it comes to our currency. That opens up the field rather nicely.

But there was another concern I briefly had with the whole notion. Which person on which bill do we replace to make room for another honouree?

I am working on the assumption there would be very little push to have the Queen's image removed from the 20s. There are too many monarchists in Canada who would quickly be up in arms if such a move was even hinted at. Besides, Trudeau does not strike me as the type of guy who would frivolously try to pick a fight, so I think he'd be up front in opposition to such a move.

I also believe there are too many traditionalists (myself among them) who would oppose Macdonald being spiked from the 10s. The first prime minister deserves at least that much recognition.

And since Laurier is the only French Canadian in that group, I suspect there would be a lot of problems involved in trying to remove him.

That leaves the 50s and 100s. There would probably be an outcry if the first woman so honoured was relegated to a denomination that few of us ever use. I think I have held a \$50 bill in my hand maybe once in the last year. I could not tell you the last time I saw a \$100 bill, let alone held one or had one in my wallet.

But, showing my ability to adjust my thinking if called for, I started wondering where it's written that there can only be one version of any denomination.

Why can't there be two versions of the \$5 bill, both the same size and colour? One could have a picture of Laurier, and the other could depict whoever ? presumably a woman.

So the only thing to do now is decide how many women are going to be on bills, and who. I'm assuming they'll leave the Queen on the 20s for now, meaning there are four possible openings for women.

The criteria set out by the Bank of Canada seems pretty reasonable to me. The person must be Canadian (by birth or naturalization) who has demonstrated outstanding leadership, achievement or distinction in any field, benefiting the people of Canada, or in the service of Canada. They have to have been dead for at least 25 years and cannot be a fictional character.

And there have been a couple names suggested.

MP?David Tilson suggested Nellie McClung, who led the effort a century ago to get the right to vote for women in Manitoba. He also mentioned Agnes Macphail, the first woman elected to the House of Commons.

I've heard a few other possibilities, like Mary Pickford and (my personal favourite) Lucy Maud Montgomery, who created Anne of Green Gables, arguably the most iconic character in Canadian fiction. One name I haven't heard mentioned, but I think deserves serious consideration, is Jeanne Sauvé, Canada's first woman governor general. Since the new bills are expected out sometimes late in 2018, Sauvé will meet the criteria of having been dead 25 years (she died in January 1993).

I'm sure there are a lot of other women who would be worthy of this kind of recognition, and plenty of people out there ready to make lots of suggestions. The idea certainly has merit, and it's frankly hard to think of an argument against it.

