

Change is in the air

by BROCK WEIR

Change is in the air ? whether you like it or not.

So, where do you fall?

Are you one who adheres to the philosophy that a change is as good as a rest? Or, might you be the type who bristles at the very thought of change, possibly with a splash of anxiety thrown in, just to spice things up?

I have to say, in all honesty, that while I naturally veer close to the latter camp, I find a change of scenery to sometimes be a pretty decent tonic.

Well, perhaps not in the case of this election.

My trepidation this time around didn't stem necessarily from the people or parties on the ballot ? in short, the ?who-to-vote-for? ? but rather the ?where-to-vote-for.?

While I have never missed an opportunity to exercise my democratic rights, for the last decade-and-a-half I've cast my Federal vote not only in a riding in which I live (I'm a stickler for the rules here) but also the riding in which I work and, by extension, cover for readers.

This time, however, the latter part of the equation was not a factor, and I have to admit I did feel a little bit of a disconnect.

The beauty of this job is you get to know candidates vying for Council, Mayor, Member of Parliament and Member of Provincial Parliament reasonably well. Above and beyond the platform planks announced by their respective party's leaders, should that be applicable, you get some insight into what makes each candidate tick as a person and which local issues they're particularly passionate.

This time, I had a bit more homework to do before casting my vote. Well, I had something of a small head start being neighbours with the area's incumbent Member of Parliament who is seeking re-election, but there were four others also vying for my vote, so I did my due diligence.

I wasn't, however, sure what to expect going to my polling place on Easter Sunday.

Social media posts in other jurisdictions made it seem like advance polls were not only extremely busy for a Federal election, but in certain pockets of the country, a magnet for partisan nonsense on all sides.

Some polling stations were seeing questions raised about the security of their vote based on the mistaken notion that one can only mark their ballot paper with a pencil rather than a pen ? not true, as Elections Canada had to announce a number of times over the weekend ? and myriad other made-up problems.

I anticipated quite a wait before getting my ballot and taking the pencil ? both options were available in my cardboard cubicle, for the record ? in hand, but it couldn't have been smoother and the whole process was done in 10 minutes.

Looking over the ballot, confident in my choice, I flexed my democratic muscles and did my duty as a Canadian. As I started to place my ballot into the box, however, I was momentarily distracted by chatter one polling station over.

There was a bit of a minor brouhaha going on as someone attempted to take a photo in the gymnasium.

'There's no photography allowed in here,' said the volunteer with a boom that seemed more of a reflection of the actual timbre of his voice rather than any specific urgency in shutting the photo op down.

Instead of putting her phone down, the woman trying to take the photo explained she wanted to take a snap of her companion placing her ballot into the slot because this was her very first election as a new Canadian citizen.

The other cheek was ultimately turned and, to the camera, this first-time voter gave a big, bright grin and a thumbs-up as she gently tapped in the ballot, which is now waiting for its turn to get counted in what promises to be one of the most consequential elections in decades.

We don't yet, of course, know the story that these collective ballots will tell on Monday night, but what unfolded before me was, in a nutshell, the quintessential Canadian story.

Next Monday will bring us change in one way or another, but this past Monday, April 21, brought seismic change for many members of the community upon the death of Pope Francis at the age of 88, just hours after presiding over Easter services at The Vatican.

It was a remarkable testament to the seriousness he took his role and the dedication he had for his flock that he worked until the very end.

'Pope Francis was a symbol of hope and compassion, spreading messages of peace, love, and understanding throughout the world. His legacy of humility, social justice, and environmental responsibility has profoundly impacted humanity,' said Governor General Mary Simon in a statement Monday morning.

'Whit and I met with Pope Francis during his 2022 visit to Canada, during which he apologized for the grave abuses inflicted by members of the Catholic Church on Indigenous children in residential schools. This gesture demonstrated his commitment to intercultural and interfaith respect, dialogue, and collaboration?values ??he has held dear throughout his pontificate.?

Time will be the ultimate decider on the ultimate value of his gesture to our First Nations ? reviews were mixed from those who lived it ? but his final message to the people will remain powerful not only as Cardinals meet in the coming weeks to appoint his successor and determine the church's direction forward, but as a summation of his life's work and legacy.

'On this day, I would like all of us to hope anew and to revive our trust in others, including those who are different than ourselves, or who come from distant lands, bringing unfamiliar customs, ways of life and ideas! For all of us are children of God!' he said. 'I would like us to renew our hope that peace is possible! From the Holy Sepulchre, the Church of the Resurrection, where this year Easter is being celebrated by Catholics and Orthodox on the same day, may the light of peace radiate throughout the Holy Land and the entire world. I express my closeness to the sufferings of Christians in Palestine and Israel, and to all the Israeli people and the Palestinian people. The growing climate of anti-Semitism throughout the world is worrisome. Yet at the same time, I think of the people of Gaza, and its Christian community in particular, where the terrible conflict continues to cause death and destruction and to create a dramatic and deplorable humanitarian situation. I appeal to the warring parties: call a ceasefire, release the hostages and come to the aid of a starving people that aspires to a future of peace!

'I appeal to all those in positions of political responsibility in our world not to yield to the logic of fear which only leads to isolation from others, but rather to use the resources available to help the needy, to fight hunger and to encourage initiatives that promote development. These are the 'weapons' of peace: weapons that build the future, instead of sowing seeds of death!'