

Martha's Monthly February 2008

Groundhog Day and Election Day may be the two toughest things to explain to a friend from away

Of all the strange Canadian traditions that Martha has had to explain to her friend who immigrated to Canada, Groundhog's Day has got to be one of the strangest. Here is just a sample of their recent exchange about the tradition held Feb 2nd.

Intelligent Immigrant from outside Canada: So you are telling me that once every year a bunch of sober adults, and every media outlet in the country, hover around a hole waiting for a rodent to emerge who will predict continued cold weather based on whether or not he casts a shadow that day?

Martha: Well, it sounds sillier when you say it that way.

It was a very similar conversation when Martha explained voting and elections in Alberta to a friend who moved here from another province.

Intelligent Immigrant from outside Alberta: So you are telling me that every few years a bunch of sober adults, and every media outlet in the province, hover around a polling station waiting for an election result that has not changed in more than a generation?

Martha: Well, it sounds sillier when you say it that way.

And so, just like Bill Murray in *Groundhog Day - The Movie*, voters in Alberta will live out another election day just like all the other election days of our pasts and the end will be the same as it always has been. But if you remember that movie there was self-improvement in the main character that led, eventually, to a different ending (and a Feb 3rd!) **Do the voters of Alberta have the ability to change our patterns and elect a group of people that will put the common good first?**

Martha wants to believe we do. In June 2004 when she first started writing Martha's Monthly there were more than a few naysayers that suggested that writing a letter to the government has no impact and we would be better off spending our time knitting instead of writing letters. But Martha believed that getting women's voices heard in the Alberta Legislature was important. (And anyhow, she had no knitting needles!)

In nearly four years we have tackled 40 policy issues. Ten of those issues saw policy changes after Martha letters! We called for International Travel Expenses to be made public and they were added to the websites of every department. We called on the

government to review royalties in 2004 and by 2007 they did. We called for better funding for women's shelters, for an increase in the minimum wage, for increases to AISH, for funding of lymphedema treatment, for a province wide smoking ban, for coverage of the HPV vaccine, and for the end of the Third Way. The government eventually agreed. But we still have work to do.

There are 30 policy issues that we have tackled that the government has not resolved. These are the type of questions we need to ask parties when their candidates come knocking on our door. We have called for an end to **12 year olds working in restaurants**, we have called for **rent controls**, and we have called for **limits to the growth** of the tar sands so that Fort McMurray can catch up. We have asked why Alberta is the only province where **compassionate care leave** takers don't have job protection, where **farmers** can be arrested for creating a union, and where Albertans in **long term care** can be forced to live an hour from home. We have demanded **midwifery services** be covered, that **naturopaths** be recognized, and **public education be kept free**.

But the most important things we have asked for are changes to the **status of women** in society. We have argued that accessible, affordable, quality **child care and after school care** is an essential building block for women's equality. We have argued that as long as women are the main victims of violence in the home then it is **Violence Against WOMEN**, not domestic violence. And we have made the point over and over and over that one of the most important changes we need is the **election of more women!**

So here is the challenge Martha would like to put to you this month: don't send a letter to the Premier, he is too busy making policy announcements using our ideas (just today he said we need more child care spaces!) Instead, ***send this email to all of your Albertan friends and ask them to do one thing this election: VOTE. Even better, vote for a Woman for a Change.***

And if any candidates come knocking at your door, ask them in and then ask them to tackle some of the policies listed above. For details on every one of these issues see www.marthasmonthly.ca and follow the links to the archives. As a voter, and especially as a Martha, you can, and have, made policy changes- no knitting needles required. This election we can make a difference again so that we don't relive the last four years all over again.

We would love to hear about your experiences during this election campaign. Please drop Martha a line at marthasmonthly@yahoo.ca with your thoughts and experiences. If you are on **Facebook** join the group "I'm Glad I am a Martha" to connect with Marthas all over the province. (**Martha Everywoman** has her own profile so add her as your friend!)

"Elect a Woman for a Change" was borrowed from Equal Voice. See their website at www.equalvoice.ca