



Why We need to Vote

"...however, just before dawn I woke suddenly with a sharp stab of almost physical pain. A hitherto subconscious conviction that we were beaten broke forth and dominated my mind."

Winston Churchill

Churchill's intuition was indeed to be proven right when the 1945 British General Election results were released. After a European victory and the dissolution of the Coalition government expectations were high that a purely Conservative government would be elected. To the surprise of many observers at the time Clement Atlee and the Labour party achieved a stunning victory. This may not have been achieved if a large segment of the electorate (73%) had not taken the time to cast a ballot.

We don't have to go back to 1945 to find interesting or surprising results when this democratic right is exercised. The 1961 United States Presidential election results in the state of Illinois still spark controversy between Richard Nixon and John Kennedy advocates. More recently the 2000 United States election results triggered the involvement of the Supreme Court to determine where Florida's Electoral College votes would reside. Closer to home the July 1948 Newfoundland vote continues to be a subject of much discussion. The result, by a very narrow margin (51%-49%), was in support of joining the Canadian confederation. The issue here is not the unexpected or close outcome of these voting exercises, but rather the legitimacy that is afforded to either the successful candidate or proponents.

The CSEG has looked at whether we should continue to have an elected Executive. The ongoing consensus continues to be that elections are important. It has the twin effect of placing responsibility on the successful candidate and an expectation of leadership for this group. It is not a given that all professional societies will continue with this approach. The effort that is expended to secure a full slate of candidates is not trivial. On a personal level I can certainly attest to this. At the individual candidate level there is an understanding that an already hectic business schedule will only get busier. And the realization going in that for every successful candidate someone will come in second. For most of us our egos are very sensitive and as my wife can attest to, easily bruised.

It would be false to state that all members have an obligation to vote. Certainly we enjoy the privilege of either spoiling our

ballot or abstaining. A decision to follow this course of action should not be taken lightly. Indifference to the process brings into question the mere point behind membership itself. A simple e-mail to the CSEG declaring an intention to abstain from voting sends a message to the Executive. It may also present the individual with the realization that if none are worthy of my vote then should I be stepping forward? Caution should be injected here as this may not be the contemplative pathway you want to travel down.

In 2006 the CSEG made a decision to abandon the traditional hard copy approach to voting for our Executive. The result was a disappointing 18% of the membership cast a ballot. This compares to a 25% participation rate in 2005. Frankly, while neither number is very flattering the most recent result was most disappointing. In looking at the most recent response we have decided to continue with the electronic approach for at least one more year. This will be accompanied by the presentation of candidates worthy of your support, a promotional campaign of which this column is part of, and electronic reminders prompting you to exercise your right. On behalf of the current and future Executive, this fall when the election is underway, please take a few moments and cast a ballot.

What then of the participants at the beginning of this column? Well life has a way of smiling at those who have the courage to take an active role in the democratic process. After accepting what he labeled a blessing that was mighty well disguised, Churchill was once again to become the Queen's First Minister in 1951 and later to receive the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1953. After losing in Cook County (Chicago) which many felt cost him the Presidency, Richard Nixon persevered and eventually achieved his political goal in 1968. For obvious reasons we won't follow his story beyond this point though. Lastly, after losing in Florida Al Gore was chosen to share the Nobel Peace Prize earlier this year.

No I haven't overlooked Newfoundland and Labrador. Here however, both parties were victorious. Politics aside, there is nothing quite like a walk in St. John's down George Street on a Friday night. The rest of the country can be very thankful that a small number elected to join Canada rather than remain an independent Dominion. Canada's gratitude is extended to those who took the time to vote. They made the difference. *R*

Doug Bogstie
President