

Column for June 8, 2004

Trashing the beasts responsible for littering

Hockey and politics. The top two current topics for columnists in this country with the Stanley Cup playoffs and a federal election both in play.

Heck, a news story last week combined the two, noting BetWWTS.com, a Caribbean online betting service, had placed Prime Minister Paul Martin's odds of winning the June 28 vote even with those of the seemingly much-more popular Calgary Flames winning the Stanley Cup.

Hockey fans and all those jumping on the Flames' bandwagon will know Calgary didn't get the job done in the seventh game Monday night in Tampa Bay. So what now are Martin's chances?

With three weeks to go in the federal election campaign, the Conservatives have taken a slight nationwide lead over the Liberals, according to an SES election poll.

"I think this represents a huge psychological breakthrough for the Conservatives," said SES pollster Nik Nanos on Monday.

The survey, conducted for CPAC, the parliamentary channel, shows the Conservatives in the lead for the first time at 34 per cent. The Grits trail with 32 per cent and the New Democrats have 20 per cent support.

Quebec's separatist Bloc stands at 11 per cent while the Green Party has 4 per cent. The number of undecided Canadians has hit 22 per cent.

Although still a statistical tie, it is the first time in more than 10 years the Conservatives have nudged ahead of the ruling Grits across the country.

Now that I've got all the trivial matters taken care of, I hope you are still reading and interested in an opinion topic of an entire different slant. And no, before I even begin, this is not campaign rhetoric for one political party or another that you should be free to ignore if you so please.

The fact is today's topic, the environment, or rather its protection from ourselves, needs more resolve than politicians promising to protect our renewable resources or a commitment to the Kyoto Accord. There has to be immediate efforts to better the world in which we live by changing what we can - as individuals and as local communities. We need to begin by stopping those litterbugs whose nasty, dirty old ways continue to pollute our planet.

Surely, if you get out of the house and drive or walk anywhere, you've noticed the mess. Papers, bottles and other debris are strewn at roadside, along walkways É in the countryside, along the shorelines of local lakes and in the downtown core.

It's a disgrace really. I know I'm not the only one to notice it. I get calls at the office and even visits from concerned readers.

The key word there is readers. I hold the opinion those responsible for leaving the trash behind can't read - that they aren't much more than the trash beasts which former Holidayer reporter Bonnie Baltessen labelled them.

She wondered why neanderthal trash beasts could not carry their garbage to an appropriate receptacle. "It must be due

to the fact that they have barely evolved, somehow have missed the transition to civilized society. I heard that they look a lot like humans, but I'm sure their hairy knuckles still drag on the ground somewhat."

How else do you explain the ignorance of people who leave rotting tarps, tables and chairs (as pictured on this page) at a serene spot on Lake of the Woods to ruin the natural beauty? The reader who brought in the photograph was dismayed to think what we are doing to the environment and leaving for future generations.

This is not an isolated problem spot. Nor are litterbugs or trash beasts unique to Kenora. But having done my share of travelling across the country, into some areas of spectacular natural beauty on par with Northwestern Ontario, I have to say the litter problem is more acute here.

It may be because I live in the bush here. Trash beasts tend to avoid populated areas as well, but often leave larger signs of their being than litter bugs. Couches, washing machines, metal shelving units, a box spring and mattress and much, much more has helped me easily spot their existence along less travelled roads like Transmitter, Jones or Homestake roads with which I'm quite familiar. In fact, you only have to go perhaps 100 metres off Airport Road along Homestake to see for yourself trash beasts are far from facing extinction.

It is time for residents - individuals and businesses - to take some pride in their community and take some responsibility. Why wait? Why wade through the mess for another summer?

Both news editor Bob Stewart and myself have encouraged responsibility and action before. What I'm now saying is, it is time for a group of people to carry the banner for environmentalism and begin by changing the community's apathetic attitude and instilling some pride in cleaning up our community.

In all honesty, do you discard candy wrappers, fast food containers or pop cans as you walk around or drive down the highway? What is the motivation to drop them? Is it, as Baltessen wondered, that trash beasts are so repulsed by the garbage they create that they have a need to rid themselves of it right away?

It shouldn't take an opinionated SOB like myself nor a politician's promises to bring environmental issues to the forefront. Personal pride should be enough to keep our own community and property free of litter as well as making choices to reduce, reuse and recycle in order to lessen our personal environmental impact.

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