

Economy and the environment are birds of a feather

Birds I View



Common terns will be arriving soon [photo: Bill Montevercchi]

Bill Montevercchi

‘Have not’, “have”, “have not”, fast forward to desolation row – the Danny Williams’ legacy. Years of inflated spending and spending - culminating in Paul Davis’s pathetic unethical promising 100s of millions for votes in the last week of the campaign. And it’s not like Dwight Ball and company were much different.

Millions, millions and millions of credit, credit, credit – fun while it lasted. Now the cupboard is bare and where are the Tom Marshalls and Charlene Johnsons who were ever so generous giving away taxpayers’ dollars? And let’s not forget how the recipients cherished the gifts and asked for more.

And who will pay for the government's incompetence? Who else, as always - the innocents, the unentitled and the exploitable will be shackled with insurmountable tax burdens that they do deserve.

It's not too different at Memorial University. The institution has taken on a corporate posture integrating big oil and big drug company partnerships. These relations foster an air of corporate expansionism and an over-inflated over-paid bureaucracy which has been proliferating the unnecessary at considerable expense. The province and the university would gain greater benefit from investing in faculty and staff who work the frontlines with students.

The university enjoys budgetary autonomy from government to protect academic freedom. Yet the institution's corporate development works to demise the very independence it is legislated to protect.

And who will pay for the academic glut? Look again to the innocents – hard-working secretarial staff, the maintenance crew, AND the students ... Eat cake. How about some really sensible administrative layoffs and cuts?

What does all this have to do with birds and the environment? Everything. Governments that take economic credit for granted also the use the environment as a limitless credit card with no concern long term repercussions.

The examples are obvious and disturbing - for instance the give-away and unnecessary destruction of Sandy Pond as a short-term money-saving perk for Vale. The dissolution of the manager positions at the Cape St. Mary's and Witless Bay Ecological Seabird Reserves. These globally significant seabird capitals are featured in our tourism ads and generate substantial revenues for our coastal communities. Yet they are simply taken for granted as might be expected in a third-world country with similarly sketchy economics.

Government has offered \$45,000,000 to a Norwegian aquaculture venture that will collect millions, create a scarce few jobs and flush anti-biotics, pollutants, novel viruses and dead and escaped farmed salmon into Placentia Bay. These sorts of huge short-term credit expenses fuel long-term economic disaster and environmental destruction. Witness Gray Aquaculture in Newfoundland. Environmentalists' concerns about disease and sea lice fell on deaf ears when

quick money could be made at the expense of wild salmon and their habitat. Corporate spin cannot drown out the death knell for Atlantic salmon.

Bankruptcy is the long-term partner of open-sea aquaculture. An outbreak of Infectious Salmon Anemia virus [ISA] in 2013 killed millions of farmed salmon and netted the company \$33,000,000 in federal “compensation”. This reckless endeavor failed at the expense of a mega-payout from Canadian taxpayers. Is it any wonder how deficits are created?

That plunder was followed in 2016 by a sea lice outbreak that bankrupted the Gray company, leaving a \$55,000,000 unpaid debt. Added to the compensation package, some of the real costs of open-sea aquaculture are as clear as clean water. And who will suffer from the latest demise? Don’t be concerned about the corporate swashbucklers, it’s the 64 non-unionized employees who pay the price.

Astonishingly, with so much governmental subsidy provided to open-sea aquaculture, the realization of our true long-term wealth generator – the renewable wild capture fisheries is undermined by greed, quick corporate grabs and false government “job creation” exercises.

It’s way past time that we reject the false claims of jobs and prosperity woven by corporate and economic spin doctors. Common sense clarifies that best way forward is to conserve and invest sustainably in our renewable resources harvested by local fishers not offshore corporate freezer trawlers.

And what can the experiences of environmentalists along the hard, winding and at times depressing trek of conservation and preservation offer to politico–economists? As George Monbiot an environmental columnist with *The Guardian* reminds us – an ounce of hope is worth a ton of despair. So let’s grab on to some hope and pull ourselves out of this hole with strength, independence and integrity.

You shouldn’t trust the hand that feeds you – it’s always better to feed yourself. Onward ...

Sightings of the Month

The gannets and the herring are back. See Bev Bruce's stunning video of a gannet feeding frenzy over herring schools in Long Harbour Placentia Bay on 24 April:

<https://www.facebook.com/bev.bruce/videos/o.236683269731196/10153552227613715/?type=2&theater>

A less spectacular though perhaps almost as remarkable event was afforded by the driver of the Millennium Courier van with the logo 747-RUSH. Stopped at Burton's Pond, the driver waited patiently for a pair of ducks to decide whether or not to cross the road. Eventually the ducks declined the offer.

Birds in our area

As herring moved from the south coast northward, another gannet feeding frenzy developed inside the breakwater to the Manuals Long Pond yacht club during the early morning of 7 May [Bruce and Linda Bennett].

A juvenile snowy owl was nearly grounded as it flew through Musgrave Harbour below a murder of crows in mid-April. Though osprey had returned to the area a couple of weeks earlier, I sighted my first on 7 May at Windsor Lake.

Rick West captured striking images from a movement of cedar waxwings enjoying fermented dogberries along the Rennies River on 1 May. On 9 May Richard Northcott photographed a male blue grosbeak on Ramea.

Yellow-rumped warbler are singing in the forests, and sharply plumaged American goldfinches are as well including a cheery territorial songster in a larch at the end of the Voisey's Brook Trail by the softball field.

A robin nesting in a spruce outside my wife's yoga room window laid its 3 eggs on 8 -10 May and is now sitting tight. Robins on the south coast have a head start. In Angel's Cove, a nest at Imelda Dalton's had 2 newly hatched robins on 8 May. With an incubation period of about 14 days, the eggs of these hatchlings would have been laid on about 24 April – 2 weeks before our robin in Portugal Cove.

Birds I View columns are available at
<http://play.psych.mun.ca/~mont/outreach.html>

Contacts – mont@mun.ca, 695-5305 [c], 864-7673[w], 895-2901[h].