

FIGHTING WORDS

In November 2017, a journalistic colleague wrote a farewell column to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. After almost nine years here—arriving as an eager cub reporter at the height of the oil boom in 2008, steadily building his career, writing a book—he was ready to check out. He was going home to Ontario.

From what I knew of him, he worked hard, was accurate in his facts, intelligent in his reporting and compelling in his writing. I truly admired his work. Unfortunately, what I'll most remember now is that he couldn't resist taking a smack at us on the way out.

To paraphrase: Newfoundland and Labrador is doomed. He said we have too few people (and too many who are too old), too many communities spread over too much space, too little revenue, too many demands, too little leadership, too many boondoggles and too much debt. He wasn't entirely wrong. Until he went too far. He wrote: "it's in the economic self-interest of every man, woman and child in this province to do the same thing I'm doing: pack up and move literally anywhere else."

Really?

So we should just walk away from a 500-plus-year-old commercial fishery that continues to pull in more than \$764 million annually? Abandon our producing oil fields—Hibernia, Terra Nova, White Rose and Hebron? Forget about the remaining offshore petroleum reserves? Stop producing nickel, gold and iron ore? Shut down Churchill Falls? Tap out on Muskrat Falls as it finally approaches completion? Turn our backs on a place that attracts the envy of international visitors and publications? Close the doors to Memorial University and the College of the North Atlantic? Obliterate the cultural and intellectual brain trust that could only have been tempered over centuries in this beautifully difficult place?

Everything I've said is just as real—and just as valid—as his "honest, painful reality". It is not "denial masquerading as optimism" as my erstwhile colleague accused those who believe they might actually have a promising future in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Let's take his "logic" a step further and apply it to Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. They have similar demographic and geographic woes. Should they too go all in on



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a mass relocation to... where? To do... what?

Seriously, man... what the hell were you thinking?

Staying in Atlantic Canada, surviving here, thriving here, has never been easy. I'm not denying we have serious cracks in our societal structure. Nor am I naively claiming that wishes alone will fix anything. But I do believe solutions can be found.

Not so long ago, Prince Edward Island was lagging the region in economic performance. Today, the smallest province, with the smallest population and a largely rural economy, is leading the country in full-time job growth. Their exports are expanding at double the national average, 60 per cent of their economic development is from rural areas and their population is both increasing and getting younger. P.E.I. is proof that we can "escape the depressing reality of societal poverty"—assuming you believe the cause is worth fighting for.

This past September, my *Atlantic Business Magazine* colleagues and I embarked on a regional thought leadership workshop series. We travelled to all four provinces, speaking to hundreds of people about the meaning of prosperity. We asked attendees to brainstorm about what's holding us back and what can be done to create a more prosperous society. And guess what? No one, not even once, suggested that we abandon ship.

Granted, our workshops took place before the self-described "turncoat Torontonion" penned his adieu, but I'm pretty confident his words wouldn't have swayed any of the attendees from staying the course. I strongly suspect that they would, in fact, have been even more committed to transformational change. As Henry Ford once said, "Whether you think you can, or you think you can't, you're right."

So, here's to you, James: thanks for the kick in the ass. Hope the door didn't hit yours on the way out.

Dawn Chafe started with *Atlantic Business Magazine* as a freelancer 23 years ago, becoming editor in 1998.

FEEDBACK

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