

October 25, 2014

Dear friends in Kingston;

An email is circulating locally that asks you to vote “strategically” in the upcoming municipal election (Monday, October 27).

Those who ask you to do so wrongly believe that they can predict the election’s outcome before it is decided upon at the ballot box. Essentially, they ask you to vote for “the least worst” candidate so another (arguably “worse”) candidate does not win.

We’ve come together to stand against this pessimistic electoral tactic. We believe that strategic voting is flawed and problematic. It is not sensible or democratic. Why?

First, you’re asked to disregard your preference, ignore what and whom you truly want to vote for. Strategic voting proponents intentionally corrode your beliefs, aspirations and hopes for what our city could be, which hinders a deeper collective vitality.

Second, these individuals build their argument on fear not hope. This slowly and contagiously damages our efforts to inspire democratic participation. Rather it entrenches a culture of cynicism and political distortion.

Third, strategic voting advocates in this case ignore the realities of municipal politics where the Mayor and Councillors have equal voting power, there are no parties, and consensus is the goal. Yes, the Mayor is the leader, the trendsetter, the face of the City to our community and the world; but when it comes to motions, around the horseshoe all representatives have the same power.

Fourth, strategic voting rhetoric contributes to the fallacy of “voting-splitting” that pigeonholes candidates (into progressive and conservative camps). In fact, all local contenders have policies which cut across the political spectrum. One candidate of similar ideological persuasion does not “split votes” from another even if they have similar ideas; candidates earn votes. Democratic decision making is a complex process - there is no vote taking only vote casting.

Fifth, proponents of strategic voting disregard the fact that the tactic is not guaranteed to work. They cannot actually ensure their “chosen candidate” is the right person to get behind in order to reach their desired “least worst” end.

For example, consider the rationale that you should vote for a candidate who is more well-known because they may have a “realistic chance” at winning. This argument discounts whether and how the chosen candidate is best for the job, able to attract needed votes, etc.

Following this logic it would be unrealistic for Calgarians to have voted for Naheed Nenshi in 2010 as he was polling at 8% a month before his election as a non-Councillor candidate running against provincial politicians and media personalities with name recognition.

Few pollsters would have predicted Nenshi's success as a dark horse, tech-savvy candidate. But guess what? Calgarians did not fall into the trap of strategic voting. Instead, they came together and voted for the best candidate, their preferred candidate, and he won!

But this letter is not about Calgary, it's about Kingston. Our community. This letter is not exclusive, we just asked some colleagues to sign and we invite you to do the same.

We're not telling you who to vote for. We're encouraging you to vote with your conscience. Vote your preference – regardless of candidate or campaign.

Choose what and whom you want to lead our city. Join us and vote with hope and not fear.

See you at the polls.

Sincerely,
Daniel Beals
Andy Brooke
Robert Kiley
Jeff McLaren
Brenda Slomka
Peter Stroud
Eric Walton