

A Race for Second Place: The 2011 Provincial Election in Newfoundland and Labrador

Alex Marland

Memorial University of Newfoundland¹: amarland@mun.ca

ⁱ Alex Marland, Associate Professor, Department of Political Science, Memorial University of Newfoundland, St. John's, NL, A1C 5S7, Canada. (<http://www.mun.ca/posc>). Media monitoring for this report was partly funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada as part of the Comparative Provincial Election Project led by Dr. Jared Wesley. The author wishes to thank David Cochrane, provincial affairs reporter for CBC NL, for his helpful comments on an earlier draft.

Introduction

This descriptive summary of the 2011 Newfoundland and Labrador¹ election profiles a campaign that had two significant, if predictable, outcomes: Kathy Dunderdale became the first woman in the province's history to lead her party to victory and for the first time the New Democratic Party (NDP) placed second in the popular vote. As with the previous election in 2007, that the Progressive Conservative (PC) party would continue to run the government was never in doubt, and the main question was again how many seats the Liberals and NDP would win. This time, however, there was plenty of intrigue about which party would form and lead the official opposition.

As in other provinces the 2011 campaign was influenced by the changing fortunes of the Liberal Party of Canada and the New Democratic Party of Canada. In the May 2 federal election the New Democrats coasted on leader Jack Layton's popularity to win more than a hundred seats, including both St. John's ridings, and for the first time the NDP formed the official opposition in Ottawa. Layton's untimely death in August led to public mourning that added to a spillover of NDP support in provincial politics. In contrast, the federal Liberal party's share of the vote descended to historic lows, opposition leader Michael Ignatieff resigned after losing his seat, and for the first time the Liberal party would not occupy the front benches on either side in the House of Commons. The weakened Liberal brand and party machinery likewise carried over into provincial elections in Prince Edward Island, Manitoba, Ontario, Newfoundland and Saskatchewan where every Liberal party saw its share of the vote decline. In Canada's easternmost province this race for second place would culminate in a dramatic election night and unexpected results in a number of the province's 48 electoral districts.

Danny Williams' Second Term, 2007-2010

Danny Williams' Progressive Conservative party routed the opposition in the 2007 election by winning 44 of 48 seats (Table 3). Liberal leader Gerry Reid, who lost his seat by 12 votes in that election, was replaced by MHA Yvonne Jones and the NDP leader, Lorraine Michael, remained her party's lone MHA. Premier Williams' aggressive quest for new streams of revenue by negotiating energy mega-projects and by playing hardball with Ottawa unified a majority of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians throughout his tenure as premier. This led to a cold war between the provincial PC party and federal Conservative party, exacerbated by the ideological and personal clash between Premier Williams and Prime Minister Stephen Harper, which resumed immediately after the 2007 landslide. The intense personal dispute between the two men found mass support among the many Newfoundlanders who prefer socialism over libertarianism, who support economic nationalism over federalism, and who identified with Williams' style of populism.

This prompted a political battle between the federal 'blue' Tories and the provincial 'red' Tories; in Newfoundland, the latter are far more numerous.² Though Williams had tepidly supported the federal Conservatives in the 2006 federal election, by the 2008 federal contest he coordinated an 'anything but Conservative' (ABC) movement, and directed Newfoundland PCs including his cabinet ministers to openly support federal Liberal and NDP candidates. One apparent outcome was that many red Tories in Newfoundland voted for the New Democratic Party of Canada, an act of party switching that would persist beyond 2008. In the St. John's area, which has historically elected Tories at both

¹ Hereafter "Newfoundland", "Newfoundlanders" or "NL" for readability purposes.

² Blue Tories are "traditional laissez-faire conservatives" (Behiels 2010: 120) whereas a red Tory is "a Conservative who prefers the...NDP to the Liberals, or a socialist who prefers the Conservatives to the Liberals, without really knowing why" (Horowitz 1966: 158).

levels of government, the federal New Democrats won a landslide in St. John's East and nearly won St. John's South—Mount Pearl; in 2011 they would take that seat too (Table 1). The flexible partisans and organizational bunkers needed for a provincial NDP breakthrough were in place.

Table 1
2006, 2008 and 2011 Federal Election Results in Newfoundland and Labrador

Federal Party	January 2006		October 2008		May 2011	
	Seats	% vote	Seats	% vote	Seats	% vote
Conservative Party of Canada	3	42.7	—	16.6	1	28.3
Liberal Party of Canada	4	42.8	6	46.8	4	37.9
NDP of Canada	—	13.6	1	33.7	2	32.6
Other	—	0.9	—	3.0	—	1.2

Thanks to Williams, Prime Minister Harper had become *persona non grata* in Newfoundland; though Williams was not welcomed in Ottawa circles either. When not embodying asymmetrical federalism, the premier busied himself with negotiating energy deals that were expected to generate billions in government revenues. In 2008 he reached an agreement with a consortium of oil companies to develop the Hebron offshore oil field. The next year provincial crown corporation Nalcor Energy obtained a 10 percent equity stake in the expansion of the Hibernia oil field. The provincial economy withstood the global economic storm of late 2008 and early 2009 and continued to strengthen into a 'have' province as the Newfoundland government's oil revenues and spending increased. But there were controversies too, such as the Cameron Inquiry into botched testing of breast cancer patients, the curt expunging of deputy premier Tom Rideout from cabinet, and the government's bungled expropriation of AbitibiBowater assets in Grand Falls-Windsor. After the PCs lost a by-election in a northwestern district in 2009, one that they had held since a breakthrough by-election when Williams became party leader, voter unrest was further provoked when his government removed air ambulance services from the area in apparent retaliation. Nevertheless Williams' personal popularity and corresponding confidence in his party sustained phenomenally high levels of support in public opinion polls, with a mean of 79 percent of citizens preferring him as premier throughout his second term (Table 2).

Danny Williams' own energy began to wane when, in February 2010, it emerged that he was in the United States for heart surgery. He had tapped his new deputy premier, Minister of Natural Resources Kathy Dunderdale, to run the government in his absence and she became his spokesperson amid intense national media attention. Upon his return Williams appeared to be somewhat detached from politics and he maintained a lower media profile. Icy relations with the Harper Conservatives began a slow thaw when the premier conceded that hydroelectric development of the lower Churchill River in Labrador would be more viable if the project's financing was guaranteed by Ottawa, which would reduce borrowing costs. The climax of Williams' premiership occurred that November when he signed an agreement with Nova Scotia to engage Nalcor and Nova Scotia's Emera En-

ergy in the proposed construction of an 824 megawatt hydroelectric generating station at Muskrat Falls.³ Promises of jobs, access to 'green' energy and of financial windfalls were made including the sale of unused electricity to markets in Ontario, the Maritimes and New England. The deal also excluded Hydro Quebec due to an acrimonious relationship with Newfoundland over the lopsided Churchill Falls power sale contract that runs until 2041 (Feehan and Baker 2010). However, because the lower Churchill project would be less expensive if the loan guarantee could be secured from the federal government, Newfoundland was in the throes of transitioning to a spirit of cooperative federalism. This was difficult to imagine with Harper and Williams at the helm.

A week later, on November 25, 2010, Williams announced that he would be resigning. There was speculation on a myriad of political and personal reasons—ranging from his health to his desire to avoid the legislature which had not met since June—but there was a significant reason for the timing that was underreported: if Williams had led the PC party to victory in the upcoming 2011 provincial election he would have faced pressure to remain premier for three more years lest he trigger an early election for his successor.⁴ The collective sorrow over a political messiah's departure overshadowed his decree that Dunderdale would become the province's first female premier, but only on an interim basis until a permanent leader could be selected by the PC party.

Kathy Dunderdale's Pre-Election Gambits, 2010-2011

Danny Williams' formidable influence over Newfoundland politics persisted after Kathy Dunderdale was sworn in as interim premier on December 3, 2010. Williams loyalists stayed on as key ministers, including Clyde Jackman, Charlene Johnson, Jerome Kennedy, Darin King, Tom Marshall, Joan Shea, Shawn Skinner, Susan Sullivan. Within a fortnight, Dunderdale indicated that she was considering running to become the permanent PC leader, and one-by-one potential caucus challengers came forward to endorse her leadership. Yet it did not take long for Williams, now a private citizen, to get into a rift with the new premier when Dunderdale did not act on a variety of his demands.

As distance grew between the mentor and his prodigy, Dunderdale turned to Newfoundland's public enemy number one: Stephen Harper. Confirmation of federal-provincial cooperation between the two Tory parties emerged when three former senior ministers in the Williams administration—John Otteinheimer, Loyola Sullivan and Trevor Tay-

³ Nalcor intends to follow this project with a dam built at Gull Island that would generate 2,250 megawatts. The Muskrat Falls proposal would go on to be a divisive topic that dominated Newfoundland political debate during the Fall 2012 sitting of the legislature in particular.

⁴ In 2004 the Williams PCs amended the *House of Assembly Act* to state that an election would be required within a year of a premier resigning "before the end of the third year following the most recent general election" (*Act*, section 3.1).

lor—stepped forward as Conservative Party of Canada candidates. With a federal election campaign underway, Dunderdale gambled that endorsing Harper was worth the return of his commitment to a \$6.2 billion loan guarantee for the Lower Churchill project, which pressured the federal Liberals and New Democrats to make the same pledge. On March 31, 2011 PC Members of the House of Assembly (MHAs) including Dunderdale attended a Conservative rally where the premier stood on stage with the prime minister. Days later when she was acclaimed as party leader Williams did not attend the tribute dinner that the provincial party had organized in his honour. The rift would re-emerge just before the provincial writ drop when Williams said that his communications director had been the most competent woman that he had dealt with while in office.

Whereas Williams emphasized mega-projects and creating new revenue streams by comparison the Dunderdale era initially featured old-style pork barrel politics. Her government's April budget showered social program spending increases, infrastructure development and tax cuts while running a fiscal surplus driven by oil revenues (Newfoundland and Labrador 2011). In the summer leading up to the writ drop the governing party coordinated photo-ops at a multitude of spending announcements including money for paving roads, fixing community buildings, buying health equipment and fire trucks, for training workshops and for cultural grants. *The Telegram* reported that in August 2011 there were over 100 funding announcements compared with 21 in the August preceding the 2007 election ("Numbers game", 2011). Otherwise, pre-campaigning was quiet, which was a contrast with Ontario where advertising was in full swing, and with Manitoba where a leaders' debate was held.

Table 2
Opinion Survey Data, Newfoundland and Labrador Decided Voters (2007 – 2011)

(1) "If a provincial election were held today in NL, which party would you vote for?"
(2) "Which one of the following individuals would you most prefer as Premier of NL?"
(typical margin of error +/-3.5 percent at a 95 percent confidence level)

Month	(1) Party Preference				(2) Leader Preference			
	PC	Lib	NDP	Other	Williams/ Dunderdale ¹	Reid/Jones/ Aylward ²	Michael	DK/NR
Aug. 2007	76	16	7	1	77	9	6	8
Nov. 2007	82	12	7	0	81	5	7	8
Feb. 2008	79	14	6	0	85	7	4	4
May 2008	77	13	8	1	78	7	6	7
Aug. 2008	78	14	7	0	77	8	6	9
Nov. 2008	72	19	9	0	78	8	6	9
Feb. 2009	71	22	7	1	79	11	5	5
May 2009	72	19	8	1	77	11	6	6
Aug. 2009	77	15	8	0	76	8	6	9
Nov. 2009	77	16	7	0	79	10	4	7
Feb. 2010	80	15	5	0	81	8	5	6
May 2010	75	16	8	0	79	11	4	5
Aug. 2010	76	17	7	0	77	11	6	6
Nov. 2010	75	16	8	1	76	10	9	5
Feb. 2011	73	18	8	1	64	18	5	12
May 2011	57	22	20	1	51	16	14	20
Aug. 2011	54	22	24	0	50	16	17	17

¹Danny Williams was replaced by Kathy Dunderdale, initially on an interim basis, on December 3, 2011.

²Gerry Reid resigned November 13, 2007 and was replaced by Yvonne Jones, initially on an interim basis. Jones was replaced by Kevin Aylward on August 14, 2011 while the August 2011 survey was in the field.

Source: Corporate Research Associates Inc. (<http://cra.ca>)

Nevertheless, public preference for the PC party and its leader started coming down to earth. In August, support for the PCs stood at 54 percent, while 50 percent of respondents

preferred Dunderdale as premier (Table 2). This was a steep decline from February, marked a steady increase for the NDP, and detected a sizeable number of undecideds. Even so, it signalled that the PC party would form another majority government and provided the media with a story: the race to form the official opposition.

The first-ever Canadian election contested between three female party leaders was not to be. On August 9, two months before Election Day, Yvonne Jones announced that her recovery from cancer prevented her from continuing on as Liberal leader, though she would seek re-election as an MHA. In a surreal exercise, the executive board of the Liberal party responded to the crisis by accepting leadership nominations for 48 hours. It listened to presentations from seven male contestants and consulted with party members through a telephone town hall. It settled on anointing Kevin Aylward as leader, a former junior minister in the governments of Premiers Clyde Wells, Brian Tobin and Roger Grimes. Aylward took over a hobbled party with just 56 days until Election Day and began touring the province to meet with other Liberals. Rather than galvanize his party, one candidate promptly resigned, and another resigned at the end of August. Leadership and candidate problems would be a reoccurring theme for the party throughout the campaign.

Over the summer all three parties prioritized nominating candidates and organizing campaign infrastructure. Progressive Conservative vacancies were created due to the retirements of Speaker Roger Fitzgerald (Bonavista South) and ministers Dave Denine (Mount Pearl South) and John Hickey (Lake Melville). Roland Butler (Port de Grave) and Kelvin Parsons (Burgeo-La Poile), two of the three Liberal MHAs who had withstood the 2007 Williams tidal wave, also opted for retirement. Active NDP nominations indicated the party's newfound vitality given that in 2007 it had fielded only 36 out of a possible 48 candidates. In early August the PCs had 41 nominees, the NDP had nominated 20 and the Liberals had 14 candidates (McLeod 2011a). All three parties would reach 48 candidates: the PCs on September 17, the NDP for the first time since 1993 on September 27, and the Liberals on September 28 – though the latter had to regroup when a candidate who was recruited via social media promptly withdrew. Most of the governing party's candidates were incumbents and the only notable rookie was former Auditor General John Noseworthy who would take on Lorraine Michael in Signal Hill–Quidi Vidi. Many of the opposition parties' representatives were political activists, party insiders and fringe candidates. The NDP fielded filmmaker Gerry Rogers (St. John's Centre) and party president Dale Kirby (St. John's North) as well as an 18 year old who claimed to be the youngest contestant in provincial history (NDP 2011). The Liberals brought back four past MHAs in Aylward (St. George's–Stephenville East), Dwight Ball (Humber Valley), Danny Dumaresque (The Isles of Notre Dame) and Eddie Joyce (Bay of Islands), as well as former party leader Jim Bennett (St. Barbe).

Some pre-campaign discussion about public policy emerged. The NDP initially signalled that it was shifting away from the left-wing fringe towards the median voter.

“We want small business owners to know that our platform is really going to deal with some of their concerns,” said Lorraine Michael when announcing that the NDP would reduce taxes paid by small businesses (McLeod 2011b). However, the party would prioritize its social spending flank by making policy announcements of all-day kindergarten, grants for post-secondary students, and support for fisheries workers. It would also be helped by unions and leftist interest groups; for instance the Canadian Federation of Students had close ties to some NDP candidates and launched an advocacy campaign about the merits of eliminating post-secondary tuition. Conversely the Liberal party emphasized a fisheries policy designed to reach out to rural voters.

The PC party focused on managing the Muskrat Falls file which was a reoccurring media issue before the writ was dropped. Nalcor waged a communications campaign that featured public open houses and information sessions; maintained a Web site with blogs and fact sheets; used Facebook and Twitter; and initiated media outreach such as news releases and letters to the editor with Nalcor’s president, Ed Martin, acting as chief spokesperson (O’Neill 2011). On August 19 the Government of Canada signed a memorandum of understanding with the governments of Newfoundland and Nova Scotia to provide the promised loan guarantee. A week later, a report by a federal-provincial environment panel recommended that Nalcor commission further analysis. The partisan response foreshadowed the upcoming election campaign and beyond: Dunderdale vowed that the Lower Churchill project was sensible, the Liberals and NDP argued that work should be stopped until further study was conducted, and the federal Conservatives were silent. That Danny Williams chose to reassure Newfoundlanders by pointing out that this was an opportunity to “finally shake Quebec” (VOCM 2011) indicated some concern about public confidence in his legacy project. Just before the official election campaign got underway Nalcor released a review by a consulting firm that Martin maintained was an independent endorsement of Muskrat Falls. That electioneering was in progress and that Martin, a public servant, was the lead spokesperson is evident in the remarks of Natural Resources Minister Shawn Skinner when he was asked to comment on the review: “It landed on my desk this morning when I came in. I’ve been out knocking on doors” (S. Bartlett 2011a).

As Nalcor’s communications tactics suggest, in 2011 a lot of emphasis was placed on social networking technologies. Over the summer the PC party’s website address was changed to www.dunderdale2011.ca which emphasized Dunderdale, her team, and the party’s achievements in government (Appendix 1). The premier opened a Twitter account and began micro-blogging not only about government business and community visits, but also to publicize her drive to lose body weight by jogging, which would later be synchronized with an election campaign slogan of ‘new energy. For example, on July 30 she tweeted: “Great run in Gander this morning, took 4 minutes off my time. 7.6K in

the sunshine under a blue sky” (Dunderdale 2011).⁵ Video of Dunderdale jogging was posted on her YouTube channel in August although after two weeks there had only been 33 views. Nevertheless the technology helped frame a desired image because it led to reoccurring mainstream news coverage of the premier running across finish lines and a number of personalized interviews with reporters about how she lost 100 pounds (e.g., S. Bartlett 2011c). By comparison, under the leadership of Jones the Liberals achieved some media attention with a Web site and online video critiquing the proposed Muskrat Falls hydroelectric project (McLeod 2011f; Appendix 2), but under Aylward the Liberal Web site was as directionless as the party itself (Appendix 3). By comparison, the New Democrats sought to profit off the memory of Jack Layton by emphasizing him on their homepage until the start of the campaign (Appendix 4), and Michael tweeted about supporting nominated candidates.

Writ Drop

On September 19 Premier Dunderdale visited Lieutenant Governor John Crosbie to request that an election be held on October 11 as per fixed date election legislation. “I’ve been looking forward to this since the decision was made to go for the leadership of the party, and I’m glad that the day has finally arrived,” Dunderdale said, before stumping, “Our foundation has never, never been stronger and our prospects never brighter. The once-poor cousin of Confederation is now a have province leading Canada in growth” (McLeod 2011d). This attempt to link the PC party with the province’s improved economic situation exposed an urban-rural divide that the Liberal party would attempt to exploit. “The people across this province in all the coves and communities are crying out to be heard to be respected and have some hope once again,” said Kevin Aylward at the Liberal campaign launch (CBC 2011a). With polls indicating that the NDP would pick up seats it was Lorraine Michael who sounded the most optimistic. “I truly believe that after October 11, politics in this province will have changed forever. Nobody will ever think of us as the third party again,” she said on the first day (D. Bartlett 2011c). The campaign was underway.

Campaign Dynamics

Electioneering

The 2011 campaign included the usual recipe of journalists documenting each leader’s tour, candidates putting up signs and knocking on doors, and pundits speculating about the possible outcome. The parties initially designed leader campaign stops around policy announcements. Dunderdale and Aylward toured the province and Michael ventured outside of St. John’s more often than she had in 2007. Dunderdale

⁵ After December 2011 the @KathyDunderdale Twitter account was rarely used, with just six tweets up to July 2012, and none after that (as of March 2013). By comparison, multiple tweets were issued daily from the @lorrainemichael account.

ran a classic frontrunner's campaign by greeting well-wishers and trying to avoid controversy. Among the ridings she visited were seats the PC party hoped to gain such as Bay of Islands and ones they risked losing namely Minister Skinner's in St. John's Centre and Minister Jackman's in Burin-Placentia West. Along the way there were some confrontations with protesters. The most lasting visual of the campaign was possibly of Dunderdale and Jackman challenged by a crowd of Marystown workers who were upset with the government allowing a company to export fish and who had been mobilized by a local president of the Fish, Food and Allied Workers (FFAW) union. There were also some indications that Williams' ABC campaign lingered in the public imagination. A small group of protesters in St. Anthony applied the anti-Tory message to provincial politics. "Anybody but PC for me," said one protester. "Theirs was anybody but PC in the federal. Well, ours is anybody but PC in the provincial" (CBC 2011c).

Despite the inroads between the Progressive Conservative Party of NL and the Conservative Party of Canada they kept distance from each other during the campaign. Peter Penashuae, the federal minister of intergovernmental affairs and the MP for Labrador, maintained a low public profile. Conversely local Liberal MPs and New Democrat MPs mobilized provincial troops and participated in public events. They brought in high profile MPs including potential federal Liberal leadership contender Dominic LeBlanc and Jack Layton's widow, Olivia Chow. When the provincial labour movement mourned the passing of activist Nancy Riche her St. John's funeral attracted a large number mourners including interim leader of the federal NDP Nycole Turmel.

The opposition parties needed support from their federal counterparts because by Newfoundland standards the PCs had a formidable war chest. In 2010 the governing party had raised \$690,165 compared with \$59,123 by the New Democrats and just \$30,680 by the Liberal party (Elections NL 2010). In 2011 the Progressive Conservatives reportedly had over \$1 million to spend and no debt (Cochrane 2011). By comparison the Liberals were \$700,000 in debt and, despite the help of former Premier Brian Tobin who organized a Toronto fundraiser that raised over \$100,000, that party ran a shoestring campaign. Details about the NDP's financial situation were not disclosed but supporters insisted that the party's fundraising was the strongest in its history.

The PCs reinforced a 'new energy' theme by showcasing their leader in an extensive advertising campaign. Dunderdale's image appeared in newspapers, on billboards and on busses. Online advertising included Google word searches and banner ads. Broadcast advertising was unwavering. Video showed a smiling Dunderdale speaking to off-camera interviewer (Appendix 5) as images were interspersed of her with adoring citizens including children. Her script, which was repeated in radio ads, was both uplifting and nebulous:

"There's never been a more exciting time to be in this place. Such opportunity – and the potential has just been scratched in terms of what we can do. And all of that is energizing! That makes people feel positive about themselves first of all, about

this place second of all, and thirdly, about the future and all that could be achieved. Who wouldn't be excited by it? Who wouldn't be energized by it?" (PC Party 2011a)

The PCs' positive campaign did not feature any of the negative advertising that dominates federal campaigns and which were a staple of the simultaneous Ontario election. However the few Liberal radio and TV spots attempted to raise questions in voters' minds about Dunderdale cozying up with Harper. The premier responded to accusations of a nefarious alliance by stating that she had made a strategic business calculation designed to leverage the loan guarantee. "For me, this is not about being buddies with Stephen Harper," she said on October 3. "I'm not at all interested in those kinds of [personal] relationships" (CBC 2011d).

Party Platforms and Issues

The full manifestos for all three parties were available prior to the leaders' debate. The PCs released their 'Policy Blue Book' on September 22 labelled with the 'new energy' wordmark. This packaging attempted to disguise the hallmarks of a government that was in fact a bit long in the tooth: high on championing past accomplishments, low on new ideas. For instance the Blue Book policies for families included reminders about 2007 policy commitments and about 2011 budget spending. The word 'continue' appeared over 140 times compared with 33 times in the Liberal book and four times in the NDP platform. The PCs' document was littered with the types of broad statements that provide governments with wiggle room to manoeuvre but which denote a lack of commitment to policy renewal. Fiscal prudence was the party's central message, though it was pitched softly. Economic forecasts had warned that government expenditures have to be contained due to an aging population, an unemployment rate that remains the highest in Canada, a large net provincial debt, the end of Atlantic Accord monies and oil production that is expected to drop (Locke 2011). The Blue Book cooed about the party's management of the provincial government's debt and pension liabilities. Examples of its mushy policy commitments include:

"To be fiscally responsible in certain circumstances, we may need to rearrange priorities. We will make those decisions in consultation with Newfoundlanders and Labradorians in the pre-Budget process. Implementation of our priorities will be phased, if necessary, to accommodate fiscal restraint." (PC Party 2011b: 3).

Other pledges included setting up a new division in the health department to tackle health care wait times, a plan to allow family members to deliver home care to relatives, and a promise to fund the continued freeze on post-secondary education tuition. "We're not interested in increasing our debt, even for Blue Book initiatives," said Dunderdale at the party's platform launch (Sweet and McLeod 2011). Fiscal responsibility was positioned at the start of the document and a theme of governing responsibly appeared at the end.

The NDP's communications strategy bore similarities to the 2006 federal election when the Harper Conservatives prioritized five main pledges and each day rolled out a policy announcement. The NDP manifesto, called 'It's Time,' packaged pledges into five themes that it proposed to act on in the first year of an NDP government: better health care, making life more affordable, support for seniors, money for children's programming, and changes for working people. The NDP advocated big spending on universal homecare and full-day kindergarten, and advocated for labour such as wage increases, anti-scab legislation and money for injured workers. There was the dollop of populism that the federal party had invoked including reducing tax on gasoline, lowering ambulance and driver's license fees, and giving seniors \$250 annually towards snow clearing assistance. The platform document positioned the party's economic plan at the front and its proposals for women at the back.

By comparison strong financial management was an afterthought for the Liberals. On the first full day of the campaign Aylward sought to appeal to disgruntled voters by standing on the steps of the Confederation Building and telling a crowd of public service pensioners that a Liberal government would increase their pensions. The Liberal 'People's Platform' sought to embody the party's campaign slogan 'We Can Do Better' across ten themes, with fishery proposals being positioned at the front of the policy book and fiscal responsibility placed at the end. The platform was filled with spending promises on the fisheries, for personal care homes, grants for post-secondary students, money for literacy programs, and for homelessness, as well as various regulatory changes. When talking about agriculture during a campaign stop Aylward repeated the core Liberal message: "It's time for us to focus on other things but the oil industry, which is doing us well but it's not long term in the sense of non-renewability. We've got to get back to rural Newfoundland and Labrador and industries that can grow and employ our people," he said (S. Bartlett 2011b).

None of the parties ran on a central message of better health care and yet public opinion surveys identified it as the most important issue, followed by a variety of other matters including Muskrat Falls, education and the economy (D. Bartlett 2011a; Sweet 2011). Controversy over Muskrat Falls never really caught on as it competed with coverage of the leaders' tour, policy announcements and emerging issues. Given such strong ties with their federal counterparts including local MPs who had supported a loan guarantee it was difficult for the opposition parties to pile on. Muskrat Falls did provide fodder for letters to the editor which prompted lengthy responses from senior Nalcor officials (Bennett, 2011; Martin 2011). Dunderdale rejected calls for a debate about it by saying that the project was not a source of public concern. "We're not hearing it and our candidates are not hearing it door to door. It is not an issue," she remarked on September 28 (CBC 2011b).

Debates and Polls

Various debates were held throughout the campaign, including policy-themed sessions on health care and the economy,

and the myriad of local all-candidates debates that are a staple of constituency contests. One of the policy forums produced the most memorable quote of the campaign. During a St. John's Board of Trade debate on September 27, Liberal candidate Danny Dumaresque said "that there are a hell of a lot more priorities outside the overpass that need to be addressed before we start forking more money over to the City of St. John's" (D. Bartlett 2011b). These remarks from such an outspoken former MHA and party president were linked by the media to the lack of support for the Liberal party on the St. John's side of the highway overpass. The media repeated the soundbite throughout the campaign as the remarks touched on a longstanding source of friction in Newfoundland politics.

The only debate between all three party leaders was a one-hour televised event on September 28. It was held on the floor of the House of Assembly which provided striking background visuals. The debate involved the usual opening and closing statements; questions from journalists; and opportunities for the leaders to confront each other. Discussions between Dunderdale and Michael were reasonably civil but when Aylward was engaged there was simultaneous talking and raised voices. The media picked up on one such remark, when Dunderdale blamed past Liberal governments for issuing too many fish processing licenses, saying "Mr. Aylward, your slogan is 'We can do better.' You could hardly do worse, sir" (McLeod 2011e). A more substantive statement that she directed at Michael illustrated the PC party's strategic positioning as the only party that could be trusted to manage government spending:

"Ms. Michael, tell us what you're going to cut in your balanced budget in your first year when you introduce a universal home care program...There is a plan of fiscal responsibility in place by this government. I mean, we have on one hand the Liberals that are gonna add billions of dollars to our debt, and you who are going to ignore it. That's not acceptable to the people of the province."⁶

The media reported that there was no clear debate winner. An opinion survey released by MarketQuest-Omnifacts indicated that 36 percent of respondents felt that Dunderdale had won the debate, 22 percent cited Michael, just six percent felt that Aylward had won, and 36 percent felt there was no obvious winner (MQO Research 2011).

Public opinion surveys played a bigger role in the 2011 campaign than in past Newfoundland and Labrador elections. Polls released by CRA, Environics and MQO all showed that the PCs were likely to form a majority government and that Dunderdale was the preferred choice for premier. Polls tracked a slight increase for the NDP and a decline in Liberal support. For instance between September 29 and October 3 CRA asked 800 respondents how they intended to vote with 44 percent saying PC, 18 percent NDP, 12 percent Liberal, 22 percent undecided and five percent refusing or not planning to vote (Bartlett and Sweet 2011). In

⁶ Transcribed by the author.

that poll CRA also asked how respondents would vote if Williams were still leading the Progressive Conservatives. The results: 68 percent PC, 11 percent NDP, 10 percent Liberal, nine percent undecided and one percent refused or would not vote. The PCs were on track to win a majority of seats so nothing was made of this however it suggests that Williams' backing of the Muskrat Falls deal mattered. A late campaign poll by CRA found that 58 percent of respondents supported the project, compared to 25 percent who opposed it, and 17 percent who were unsure (Sweet 2011).

Party leaders who are trailing in opinion surveys often put on a sense of bravado by saying that the only poll that matters is the one on Election Day and claim that their own research tells a different story. Kevin Aylward did that, and more. On October 3 he charged that a MQO poll was suspect because the organization had donated money to the PC party and did work for Nalcor. "In my 20 years of public service, I have not seen such a brazen attempt to influence the voter. Ms. Dunderdale bought this survey...I am putting her on notice that this is irresponsible and unacceptable," he said ("Liberals level allegations at poll company" 2011). When a subsequent CRA poll confirmed that the Liberals were indeed running a distant third Aylward insisted that Liberals had a chance to win 25 seats and form a majority government. In the final days of the campaign he maintained that commentators were "going to be in for a surprise" on Election Day (Canadian Press 2011) and even suggested that the Liberal candidate in Virginia Waters might defeat the incumbent MHA – one Kathy Dunderdale (McLeod 2011c). As voters headed to the polls the Liberal leader's credibility seemed to be on par with that of the Iraqi minister of information who in 2003 insisted that Americans were on the cusp of surrender while they were taking over Baghdad. However to some extent the resilience of the Liberal brand in the western region of the province would bear him out.

Election Results

When the votes were counted on October 11 they confirmed that Kathy Dunderdale had become the first woman in Newfoundland and Labrador, and just the second in the history of Canadian provincial politics, to lead her party to election victory. Most electoral districts remained Tory blue as the PCs collected over half of the total vote and saw a comfortable majority of 37 of 48 of its candidates elected (Table 3). Though there were some losses compared with the 2007 Williams juggernaut, only one key minister (Skinner) was defeated, and the seats outcome was three better than Williams had accomplished in 2003. The NDP placed second in popular vote for the first time ahead of the once mighty Liberals who, like their federal counterparts, continued to fade.

Table 3
2007 and 2011 Newfoundland & Labrador General Election Results

Party	2007 ¹				2011			
	Contested	Won	Votes	% vote	Contested	Won	Votes	% vote
PC	48	44	153,181	69.5	48	37	124,523	56.1
Liberal	46	3	48,598	21.1	48	6	42,411	19.1
NDP	36	1	18,106	8.2	48	5	54,513	24.6
Other	3	—	514	0.2	3	—	430	0.2

Source: Preliminary 2011 results from Elections Newfoundland and Labrador (www.elections.gov.nl.ca)

Yet there were surprises. Election night news coverage was a seesaw: at first the NDP looked like it would form the official opposition, then a tie with the Liberals seemed likely, then as some close races were decided the final outcome was six Liberal MHAs and five NDP MHAs. The results were a reminder that province-wide opinion polls do not take into account the oddities of the single member plurality electoral system or the local dynamics in ridings where just 5,000 people vote. The concentration of Liberal support in western NL contributed to the defeat of Minister Patty Pottle (Tornat Mountains); the return of former MHAs Eddie Joyce (Bay of Islands) and of Dwight Ball (Humber Valley) who won by 68 votes; the victories of former leaders Yvonne Jones (Cartright–L'Anse au Clair) and of Jim Bennett (St. Barbe) by 36 votes; and the election of the incumbent's son, Andrew Parsons, in Burgeo–La Poile. However their western strength meant that the Liberals were unable to hold Port de Grave in the east. The surprise of the night was therefore not only that the Liberal incumbent lost in The Straits–White Bay North but that it was an upstart NDP candidate, Christopher Mitchelmore, who won a tight three-way race in a western area of the province that was still upset about the PCs' air ambulance decision. The New Democrats also almost knocked off Minister Jackman in Burin–Placentia West where he was re-elected by just 40 votes.

The NDP breakthrough was nevertheless largely a St. John's area phenomenon, where it was helped by a feeble Liberal showing. The mountain that the party climbed is illustrated by Dale Kirby's victory in St. John's North. In 2007 the PC incumbent was re-elected with 78 percent of the vote and the NDP was a fringe outfit that placed third with 10 percent; by 2011 the NDP registered 55 percent whereas the same PC candidate dropped to 41 percent. It was a similar story in St. John's Centre where Gerry Rogers defeated Minister Skinner and in St. John's East where George Murphy, a taxi driver and spokesperson for the 'Consumer Group for Fair Gas Prices', took a long-time Tory seat. There are many circumstances that led to the New Democrats' breakthrough. These include the Williams ABC campaign that stimulated flexible partisanship; electors' aversion to the libertarianism espoused by blue Tories; organizational strength brought on by the presence of New Democrat MPs; the afterglow of Layton's death; and the fringe status of the Liberal party. In the next election it will be interesting to see whether the red Tories of St. John's continue to vote NDP.

How did the leaders fare in their own ridings? Despite Aylward's prognostications Dunderdale handily won her St. John's seat with 60 percent of the vote whereas the Liberal candidate there received less than 10 percent and Michael was easily re-elected in Signal Hill–Quidi Vidi. But for the second straight election the leader of the Liberal party did not win his seat meaning that Aylward would be faced with even more questions about his leadership. Election turnout likewise continued a downward trend, registering a new low of 57.9 percent.

Premier Dunderdale's First Term, 2011- 2015(?)

Depending on your perspective nothing significant or something meaningful changed in the 2011 election. The Progressive Conservatives obtained a mandate to carry on as a managerial government with the same premier, a similar caucus and few new policy ideas. Yet in other ways 2011 marked a new era. A woman had led her party to election victory, many women were part of the premier's inner circle, and Newfoundland had its first openly homosexual MHA.⁷ Moreover for the first time in a generation two parties met the minimum of three seats needed for official party status.⁸ There was therefore much anticipation that the dynamics in the House of Assembly would be different. People would have to wait, however, because Dunderdale opted not to open the legislature for a Fall sitting which prompted organized criticism and unrelenting news coverage about what would prove to be a nine month hiatus.

One immediate change was that Kevin Aylward would not be leading the Liberal party. Aylward had delivered more seats than expected, but a leader needs a presence in the legislature, and two weeks after the election he announced his resignation. Media interest in businessman Dean MacDonald intensified when he commented that he was "definitely interested" in leading the party one day (McLeod 2011g). The similarities between MacDonald's career path and that of a younger Williams, his former cable industry partner, were inferred to mean that Newfoundland's latest political superhero had been found. "Heck, the men even look alike," observed *The Telegram* ("Danny and Dean" 2011). In December the party's executive board selected MHA Dwight Ball as interim leader and in April 2012 Ball announced that MacDonald would be a participant in a "Liberal renewal tour" to listen to voters across the province. Despite the media's anticipation of a coronation, in late 2012 MacDonald bowed out, citing timing. The media moved on to other potential contestants, who after some reflection also stated that they would not run, leaving Ball as potentially the only candidate for a November 2013 leadership convention. For whoever becomes Liberal leader the work involved in rebuilding the party in the new dynamic of a three-party system could prove to be a thankless task.

Premier Dunderdale and the PC Party faced pressing challenges too. On October 28 a message of steady stewardship and fiscal restraint was communicated with a leaner cabinet of familiar faces and four fewer government departments. Unfortunately for the province, the 2012 budget would be based on projections of crude oil at \$124/barrel

where it hovered at the time, but the price dropped to below \$90 in June 2012, before approaching \$120 again in February 2013. Premier Dunderdale and her ministers warned about the need to rein in spending – an unwelcome message in a province where government plays an important role in so many communities and lives. The premier's query about "How do we give a high quality of service to the people of the province but how do we ratchet back that spending, so that in 10 years time we're not billions and billions and billions of dollars in debt again?" (CBC 2012) is a complex public policy issue with no easy solution.

Arguably, the overarching narrative was the declining popularity of the PC Party and its leader, and the rise of the NDP. The trend began in Williams' last year of office, was exacerbated under Dunderdale prior to the election (Table 2), and persisted post-election which we would normally expect to be a honeymoon period for the victor. In September 2012 St. John's South MHA Tom Osborne – the only remaining PC MHA from those first elected in the 1999 general election – left to sit as an Independent, citing discontent with the party's leadership. A subsequent November poll found that if an election were held 46 percent would vote PC, 31 percent NDP and 23 percent Liberal. Moreover just 36 percent preferred Dunderdale as premier, 29 percent said Lorraine Michael, 18 percent picked Ball, while the rest were unsure (Corporate Research Associates 2012). The PC party and its leader remained the most popular options, but the trend was of growing voter dissatisfaction and unstable partisanship. The New Democratic Party was so buoyed by the uptick in their public support that in January 2013 Michael said, "I know now that every time I look at a candidate, I have to think cabinet...That's a new thing for us" (NTV 2013). This marks a dramatic transformation for a party that in the 2007 election was unable to field a full slate of candidates and won just one seat.

The next federal and provincial elections are both scheduled to be held in October 2015. Those campaigns will further reveal the connection between federal and provincial party politics in Newfoundland and Labrador, including the lingering effects of the ABC campaign, hostility towards Prime Minister Harper and the memory of Jack Layton, as well as the anticipated influence of Justin Trudeau on revitalizing the Liberal party brand. To lead her party to a fourth consecutive mandate Kathy Dunderdale will likely need to channel some new energy.

References

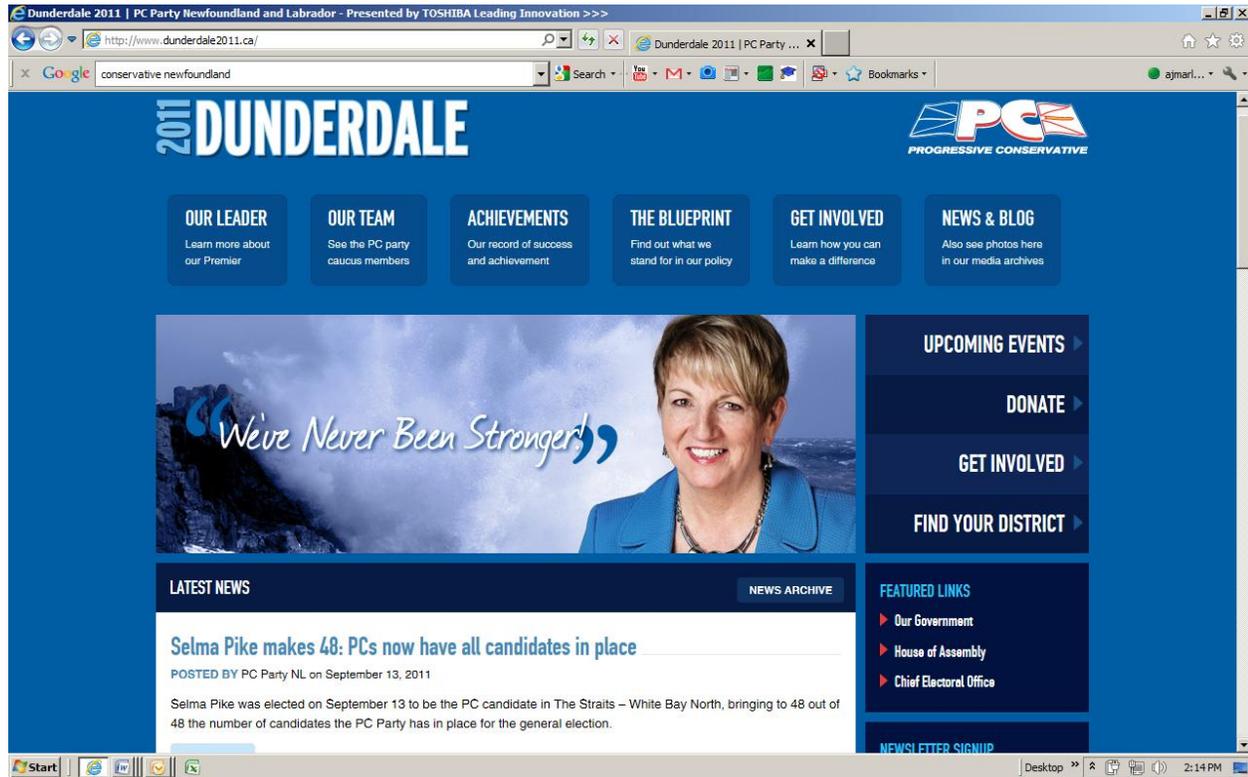
- Bartlett, Dave. 2011a. "A race for second place?" *The Telegram* (September 21): A3.
- Bartlett, Dave. 2011b. "Playing up the urban-rural divide?" *The Telegram* (September 29): A9.
- Bartlett, Dave. 2011c. "NDP expects a breakthrough." *The Telegram* (September 20): A1.
- Bartlett, Steve. 2011a. "Release of Muskrat Falls report unrelated to election, Nalcor says." *The Telegram* (September 16): A1.

⁷ Upon winning her seat Gerry Rogers said, "I am very proud to be able to loudly declare that I am a lesbian, that I have a very loving partner, and that I am the first out MHA in Newfoundland and Labrador" (Fitzpatrick and Sweet 2011).

⁸ This has happened only a handful of times in Newfoundland including 1913, 1928 and 1975. Perhaps because a third party is such a rarity there is some confusion about what constitutes official party status; see endnote 64 in Marland (2011).

- Bartlett, Steve. 2011b. "Liberals tout local agriculture." *The Telegram* (September 24): A4.
- Bartlett, Steve. 2011c. "A premier performance." *The Telegram* (July 22): A1.
- Bartlett, Steve and Barb Sweet. 2011. "Having her own mandate is important, Dunderdale says." *The Telegram* (October 8): A1, A5.
- Bennett, Gilbert. 2011. "Nalcor considered the alternatives." *The Telegram* (October 4): A6.
- Behiels, Michael D. 2010. "Stephen Harper's rise to power: Will his 'new' Conservative party become Canada's 'natural governing party' of the twenty-first century?" *American Review of Canadian Studies*, 40(1): 118-145.
- Canadian Press. 2011. "Liberals a distant third in Environics poll." *The Telegram* (October 6): A7.
- CBC. 2011a. "Liberal strategy emphasizes rural voters." <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/newfoundland-labrador/story/2011/09/19/nl-liberals-campaign-launch-rural-919.html> (September 19).
- CBC. 2011b. "No need for Muskrat Falls debate: PCs." <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nlvotes2011/story/2011/09/28/nl-muskrat-falls-debate-nlvotes-928.html> (September 28).
- CBC. 2011c. "Air ambulance protesters dog Dunderdale." <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nlvotes2011/story/2011/09/30/nl-air-ambulance-dunderdale-nlvotes-930.html> (September 30).
- CBC. 2011d. "Not 'buddies' with Harper, Dunderdale says." <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/newfoundland-labrador/story/2011/10/03/nl-dunderdale-morning-show-103.html> (October 3).
- CBC. 2012. "Spending will be ratcheted down, Dunderdale warns." <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/newfoundland-labrador/story/2012/10/15/nl-kathy-dunderdale-oil-spending-1015.html> (October 15).
- Cochrane, David. 2011. "Four more years versus four more seats." <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/newfoundland-labrador/story/2011/09/19/nl-cochrane-four-years-seats-919.html> (September 19).
- Corporate Research Associates. 2012. "Support for NL PC government stable, remains highest in Atlantic Canada." <http://cra.ca/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/12-4-NL-Release.pdf> (December 5).
- "Danny and Dean." 2011. *The Telegram* (October 21): A6.
- Dunderdale, Kathy. 2011. @KathyDunderdale. Twitter post. <https://twitter.com/#!/KathyDunderdale> (July 30).
- Elections Newfoundland and Labrador. 2010. "2010 calendar year: Contributions to political parties either individually or in total valued at more than \$100." <http://www.elections.gov.nl.ca/elections/PoliticalFinanceReports/PDF/finance.2010/2010Contributions.pdf>
- Feehan, James P. and Melvin Baker. 2011. "The Churchill Falls contract and why Newfoundlanders can't get over it." *Policy Options* (September): 65-70.
- Fitzpatrick, Ashley and Barb Sweet. 2011. "Rogers defeats prominent cabinet minister in St. John's centre." *The Telegram* (October 12): A5.
- "Liberals level allegations at poll company." 2011. *The Telegram* (October 4): A3.
- Locke, Wade. 2011. "Newfoundland and Labrador, from austerity to prosperity – and back to austerity(?): Planning to avoid a financial crisis." *Newfoundland Quarterly* 104(2): 39-41.
- Marland, Alex. 2011. "Order, please!: The Newfoundland and Labrador House of Assembly." Canadian Study of Parliament Group. http://www.studyparliament.ca/English/pdf/Newfoundland_Marland-e.pdf
- Martin, Ed. 2011. "Muskrat Falls is needed." *The Telegram* (October 8): A23.
- McLeod, James. 2011a. "Election nominations in full swing." *The Telegram* (August 6): A5.
- McLeod, James. 2011b. "NDP proposes tax cut for small business." *The Telegram* (September 2): D1.
- McLeod, James. 2011c. "Aylward talks up the good old days." *The Telegram* (October 8): A3.
- McLeod, James. 2011d. "Dunderdale confident of election success." *The Telegram* (September 20): A1.
- McLeod, James. 2011e. "No clear winner during televised debate." *The Telegram* (September 29): A1.
- McLeod, James. 2011f. "Liberal party ready for election." *The Telegram* (May 30): A1.
- McLeod, James. 2011g. "'Today I want to talk about leadership:' Macdonald." *The Telegram* (October 20): A1.
- MQO Research. 2011. "MQO Research polls NLers during second week of election." Press release (September 30).
- NDP. 2011. "New NDP candidates are Stephenville woman and youngest NL candidate ever." <http://www.nl.ndp.ca/nr090911NomCloseCBSandSGSE> (September 9).
- Newfoundland and Labrador. 2011. "Budget 2011: Highlights." <http://www.budget.gov.nl.ca/budget2011/highlights/highlights2011.pdf>.
- NTV. 2013. "NDP leader seeks cabinet material when recruiting candidates." <http://ntv.ca/ndp-leader-seeks-cabinet-material-when-recruiting-candidates/> (January 20).
- "Numbers game." 2011. *The Telegram* (September 2): A6.
- O'Neill, Karen. 2011. "Nalcor's blog: Sharing information on Muskrat Falls." <http://nalcorblog.com/sharing-information-on-muskrat-falls> (October 7).
- PC Party of Newfoundland and Labrador. 2011a. "New Energy". http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=No_VVfHZwOY (September 19).
- PC Party of Newfoundland and Labrador. 2011b. "2011 Policy Blue Book: New Energy".
- Sweet, Barb. 2011. "What matters: Health care top election issue for voters." *The Telegram* (October 7): A1.
- Sweet, Barb and James McLeod. 2011. "PC promises would cost \$135M a year." *The Telegram* (September 23): A1.
- VOCM. 2011. "Williams comments on Muskrat Falls review." <http://www.vocm.com/newsarticle.asp?mn=2&id=16449&lates t=1> (August 27).

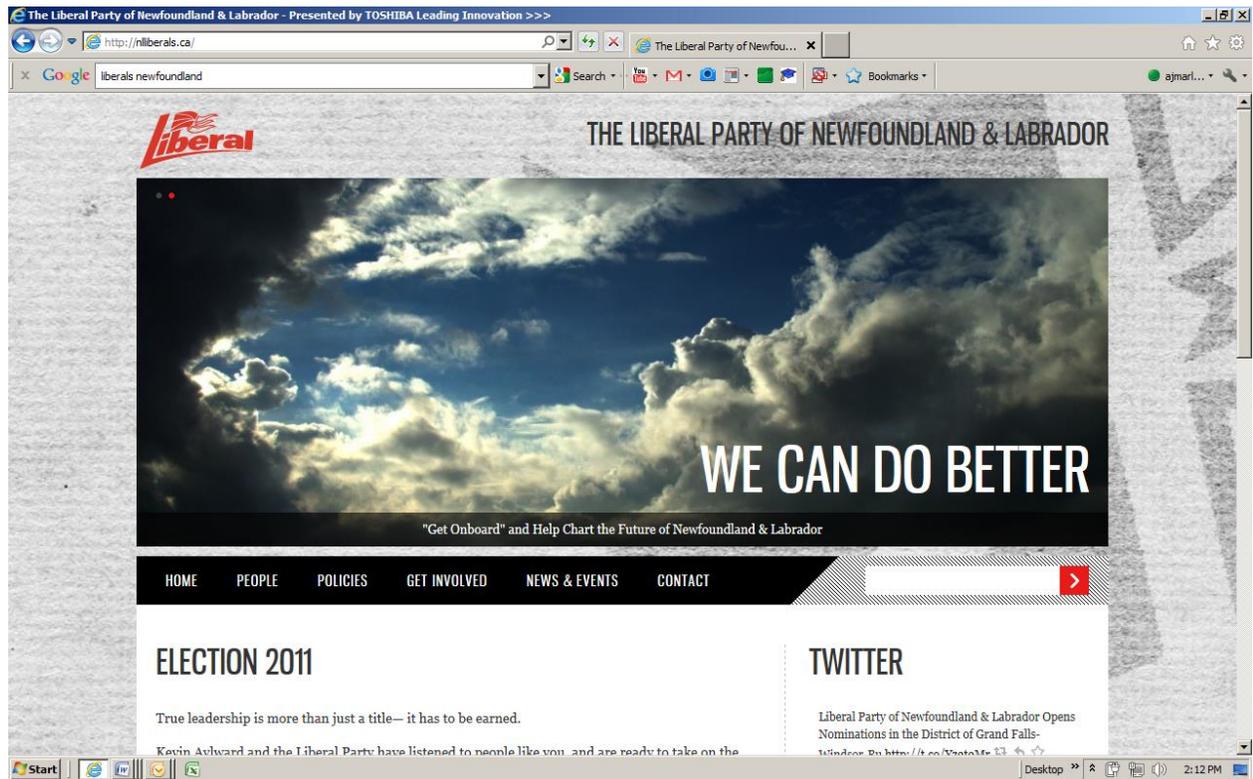
Appendix 1
Screenshot of PC party homepage www.dunderdale2011.ca
(September 14, 2011)



Appendix 2
Screenshot of Liberal "MuskratFails" homepage
<http://muskratfails.ca/> (May 30, 2011)



Appendix 3
Screenshot of Liberal homepage <http://nlliberals.ca> (September 14, 2011)



Appendix 4
Screenshot of NDP homepage www.nl.ndp.ca (September 14, 2011)



Appendix 5
Screenshot of PC Party video “Kathy Dunderdale: New Energy
All Around Us”

