

What apathy?

Some municipal elections brought out lots of voters

By ALISIA MORRISSEY
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Unfortunately voters still seem to be apathetic, but on the bright side, there have been elections when they've cared less.

Voter turnout in this province's municipal elections Tuesday generally hovered between 40 and 60 per cent, but in some spots residents came out in droves with Long Harbour getting 94 per cent voter turnout, Bay Bulls had more than 70 per cent of the possible voters show up and cast ballots to elect pretty much the same council and 72 per cent of registered voters cast ballots in Grand Bank.

Graham Letto, former mayor of Labrador City and president of Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador, said the official numbers aren't in yet, but that all indications show that voter turnouts were generally high in Tuesday's election — a rare trend in municipal elections.

"I think in a lot of cases if you look at where the voter turnout was high, it's where they've had a lot of people running and there's been issues... and that usually tends to get people out," Letto said, adding that the

provincial "Make Your Mark" campaign to get more candidates involved helped as well.

But more than anything else, Letto says, people are starting to realize municipal issues — garbage collection, wastewater and sewer services, for example — are voter issues.

"It's very important to have good leadership in your community and it really dictates whether your community is going to be successful or not," Letto said. "You put all those things together and I think it's finally to the point where the interest has certainly increased."

The important thing now is to keep people's interest in municipal politics, Letto said.

Meanwhile, there were some towns with even lower than average turnout at the polls, such as Carnarville, which had a 12.9 per cent turnout, and Burin, which had a turnout of just 25 per cent.

"We still have communities that did not have enough people to run and these are the smaller communi-

ties, but it's becoming a level of government that's getting its due attention and its due respect," Letto said.

Municipal Affairs Minister Dianne Whalen isn't available to the media during the week after the general municipal election, though her department did quote her in a news release announcing a number of special elections and congratulating the nearly 2,000 candidates that participated.

"Municipal government impacts our everyday lives and councillors put considerable time and effort into strengthening municipal services and improving our communities. All candidates should be commended for their leadership, commitment and interest in working to secure our communities for future generations," Whalen said.

Of the 266 municipalities eligible to hold elections in 2009, elections were held in 137, and 100 towns had councils elected by acclamation.

amorrissey@thetelegram.com