



The CBC Pensioners
National Association

Preserving our Future, Sharing our Past

L'Association nationale
des retraités de la SRC

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DURHAM CHAPTER



SPECIAL ELECTION ISSUE 2019

With the election almost upon us, there are some issues of particular importance to pensioners. Please read and look for opportunities to discuss with your candidates.

OUR PENSION SECURITY IS THREATENED AGAIN

Bill C-27 is back! Time to defend Defined Benefit Pensions

by Bob Ross

An email from the PNA website caught my eye recently. It was an article by Howard Simpson, PNA representative on the Canadian Coalition for Retirement Security. He called his item, The Pre-Halloween Election. It mentioned Bill C-27. I had thought that bill would die once the election was called but Howard Simpson raises a red flag. Every pensioner should be alert. Here are the highlights from that article.

The main point is that Bill C-27 is a law introduced by Finance Minister Bill Morneau. It would add Target Benefit Pension Plans to the list of options for employers in the Federal arena. That includes CBC. But the bill does more than make these plans available:

It openly encourages employers to convert existing Defined Benefit Plans (like ours) to Target Benefit Plans, thus greatly reducing management's financial obligations. The idea was originally introduced by Prime Minister Stephen Harper. But it generated such a backlash from plan members, retirees and other fair-minded voters that the bill was withdrawn in the run up to that election. But the idea that died back then has been picked up by the Liberals and re-introduced as Bill C-27.*

Since being introduced, Bill C-27 has barely made it past first reading. It has languished longer than any previous piece of legislation in history. When finally at second reading, it was greeted by widespread protests, particularly from organized labour. The government withdrew it for “further consultation.” Parliamentary procedural rules are that when the writ calling an election is dropped any un-passed bills die on the Order Paper. End of story? Nope.

Now we learn of behind the scenes activity threatening retirees in the federal domain. Apparently the malign genius Bill Morneau has a plan which the coalition labels “C-27 through the back door”.

Here’s how it works. Pension Plans in the Federal domain are monitored by the Office of the Superintendent of Financial Institutions (OSFI). It assures the application of the relevant parts of the law and rigorously interprets and applies the regulations that flow from the legislation. Trouble is, this independent body reports to Parliament through the Minister of Finance. Guess who: Bill Morneau.

Apparently the Ministry of Finance wants OSFI to modify the regulations governing pension plans to allow an employer to reduce benefits temporarily or permanently to a level that the funding can afford. The “defined” or guaranteed benefit would, thus, become a “target”, meaning “sometimes we hit it and sometimes we don’t. This would mean we – employees and pensioners - would assume all the risk.

As we understand it, this move to “amend” would not involve employee or pensioner input. It would not need our support to implement it. In his article, Howard Simpson suggests we can combat this new and undemocratic move. For Pensioners the most import step it to be aware. Next we must give voice to our objection. And you can let federal candidates know what you think. Defend your retirement security.

*To recall the history of the idea of Target Benefit Plans check our PNA website under “newsletter” and find the November 2018 issue of Contact. There you will find an article “An Election Is Coming”. It describes our opposition to this concept and our involvement with the Canadian Coalition for Retirement Security.

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NATIONAL PHARMACARE – EMPTY PROMISES OR REAL PLANS?

By Dan Oldfield

A national pharmacare program is very much on the national agenda for this election. Such a plan would provide significant benefits for all Canadians. Prescription drugs generally constitute the biggest single expenditure of any supplementary healthcare plan. A national plan would result in a significant cut in premium costs for existing plan participants and/or allow for improvements in other benefits.

The Liberals promised a national plan during the last election campaign and have renewed their commitment this time. But as was the case before, they are not long on details or timing. Both the NDP and the Green Party have also promised a national plan. The NDP is promising a plan by the end of next year which will include dental, eye and hearing coverage in the existing healthcare benefits. The Green Party has come part way by promising dental coverage for low income Canadians. The Conservative Party has rejected a national pharmacare plan, opting instead to provide money for more MRI and CT machines.

Canada remains the only western democracy with publicly funded health care that does not include prescription drug coverage. When talking with your candidates, ask about pharmacare as a priority and the extent of proposed coverage.

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THE PARTIES ON SENIORS' ISSUES

Traditionally, the senior vote turns out in a federal election, generally around 85 percent of eligible voters making a trip to the polls. For that reason, political parties have usually targeted seniors. But in this campaign, not so much.

A glance at the platforms for the major parties doesn't seem to offer much hope that any of them are particularly focused on those issues specific to citizens on fixed incomes. The Liberals are promising a 10% boost in old age security by age 75 and a 25% hike in CPP for widows and widowers. The NDP and the Green Party are promising a national seniors' strategy but without any particular details other than addressing issues of dementia and long-term beds. The Conservatives and the other parties are also taking the view that seniors will benefit with other initiatives addressing the affordability of everyday life.

The reason the political parties may not be targeting seniors to any great extent is that voting patterns have begun to change. While seniors have pretty much always voted, the number of younger voters continues to climb. In the last federal election, an analysis by CBC showed voter turnout among the younger group of voters jumped 12 points to 67 per cent while voter participation among 65 to 74 year olds rose only slightly to 86 per cent. Practically, that means an estimated 1.7 million younger voters cast a ballot last time compared with 2.5 million older voters. It's still a big difference but the younger cohort of voters still has room to grow while the 65 to 74-year-old age group already has the highest voter turnout in the country.

Having said all that, senior voters are a group politicians still need to give a lot of attention. So it's up to us to demand that attention and hold them accountable.

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