

OLDER AND WISER: Federal election's impact on local seniors

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Older and **WISER**

Tom Carney



The federal election is over.

What's a new government led by the Liberals likely to mean to seniors? Let's start with the pocket book issues. The middle class (\$45,000-\$90,000) will pay a little less tax and the wealthiest Canadians (\$200,000 and up) will pay a little more. The Tax-Free Savings Account increase to \$10,000 is cancelled and the decision to increase Old Age Security eligibility to age 67 is repealed.

A new Seniors Price Index will ensure that OAS and the Guaranteed Income Supplement keep up with living costs. The Home Accessibility Tax Credit and pension splitting remain on the table. Three other issues, healthcare, housing and assisted dying, bear watching.

I don't know which was more surprising: the fact that the Conservatives barely mentioned healthcare in the campaign or that most voters didn't seem to notice. The Liberals want to negotiate a new long-term health accord with the provinces. The NDP and the Greens wanted to restore the loss of the six per cent annual increase to healthcare transfers to the provinces. With a core inflation rate of 2.4 per cent and a price tag of about \$35 billion over 10 years that's a big ask.

The Liberals are also promising more money for home care and there is a commitment to reduce prescription drug costs and to improve mental healthcare.

The Liberals who, unlike the Conservatives, are on side with the Supreme Court decision on physician-assisted death want to set up an all-party committee to study the issue. It may be too late for that. The one-year grace period the Supreme Court gave Parliament to draft a new law on assisted suicide expires in February 2016. The best course of action, in my opinion, would be to allow a free vote in Parliament on physician-assisted death. If the government dallies here the court, not Parliament, will decide this issue.

Housing gets a jump start from the Liberals with a new 10-year \$20 billion investment in social infrastructure.

Whoa! Are we talking about a national housing strategy here? Maybe, I'm not sure. It's been so long since I've seen one of those that I've forgotten what it looks like.

The NDP's campaign seems to have confused a lot of voters, myself included. When was the last time you heard of a socialist party arguing for a balanced budget and a tax cut for small businesses? Taxing the tooth fairy is more their style. While the three mainstream parties play a game of musical chairs with OAS age eligibility rules - it's down, it's up, it's down again - the Green's platform included a guaranteed livable wage for seniors, a national seniors strategy and a focus on aging in place. No party has a monopoly on good ideas but the Greens, in my opinion, are the party that gets it when it comes to seniors issues.

If you are disappointed with the outcome of this election take heart. The government doesn't always keep their election promises and you will have an opportunity to mark your ballot again in another four years

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