



Time to combat wave of apathy

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The start of a new year has done little to quell the apathy sweeping across Canada. The electorate appears, for the most part, indifferent to the thought of elections being called by either the prime minister or Alberta's premier. Recent polls indicate many Canadians "do not know" or "do not care" when asked who they would vote for if either the governor general or the lieutenant-governor drop the election writ this spring.

Radio talk show hosts will undoubtedly scramble to locate experts who could help their listeners understand this wave of indifference. Grumpy citizens can be heard to complain: "Nothing is going to change," or "The politicians merely offer hollow platitudes," and "They all do whatever they want anyway so my vote doesn't count."

Ever helpful, the Calgary Chamber of Commerce offers a few modest New Year's resolutions to the Prime Minister and Alberta premier to fight this winter lethargy.

Since the Prime Minister's home riding is in Calgary, Stephen Harper is well aware of the city's critical labour shortage and that Alberta is fuelling the nation's economy.

The Chamber's members believe these three resolutions could help elect the next majority government in Ottawa:

- Attract the next wave of talent by reducing personal income taxes from 12% to 8.5% of Canada's GDP (gross national product) and nicely place Canada as the lowest in the OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) countries.
- Increase staff and infrastructure levels at all Canadian Consulates to improve the visa/work permit processing times for permanent residents, temporary foreign workers and international students. This especially applies to locations -- such as China, India, and the Philippines -- with large backlogs of applications.
- Entice the baby boomers (also known as older workers) to stay in the workforce by increasing their annual Canada Pension Plan benefits by 12% per year after age 70. The Chamber estimates this could increase Canada's labour pool by as many as 767,000 immediately and 1.7 million by 2056. It would also generate more than \$24 billion in government tax revenues and pension savings at once, increasing to over \$49 billion in 2056.

If pundits are believed, Alberta's provincial race will heat up early in 2008. The Chamber's members make these recommendations to engage voters and create a winning platform:

- Adopt a vision for the province's future prosperity that clearly defines how non-renewable resource revenues and the fiscal management framework contribute to achieving this vision.
- Implement a 'bandwidth approach' to government spending which limits spending to a clever formula (bottom line = population + inflation growth; top line = real GDP + inflation growth).



- Create an office of Municipal Auditor-General to conduct value-for-money audits on programs so taxpayers understand they are receiving an excellent return on their taxes or axe any that merely waste hard-earned dollars.

So why are Canadians so unresponsive and uncaring about elections? Some pollsters claim the electorate is depressed about the crop of potential politicians, ruling parties and coalitions. Others maintain many of the disenfranchised are discouraged from voting. The profound thinkers believe that because the economy is going well, there is little aptitude for sweeping political changes.

To fight these waves of indifference, the Chamber encourages Calgarians to vote for the parties and leaders who offer lower taxes, economic growth, improvements to the labour shortage, health care, education, transportation, and affordable housing.