

## **Why We Should Vote on Election Day**

According to many surveys, the vast majority of Canadian citizens do not plan to vote this coming federal elections. If you are reading this article before May 2, 2011, I hope that this article will convince you not to waste your right to vote for the reasons explained below.

### A Citizen's Right and Privilege

One of the most important distinctions between permanent residents and citizens is the latter's right to vote. It is as much a right as it is a privilege. More than that, it is also a civic duty and should therefore not be taken for granted. For many of us who are naturalized citizens, it is a concrete and wonderful opportunity to participate in the decision-making process of the country which we have chosen to call our own.

### Environmental Degradation

Recent natural disasters worldwide remind us of our extreme vulnerability vis-à-vis our natural habitat. Therefore, the government's plans and policies concerning the environment should be a top priority. We need to remember that we are but stewards of the earth and should be acting responsibly, instead of wantonly destroying the very sources of our survival.

If we wish to allow the future generations to continue enjoying the quality of life that we have now, we should pay careful attention to how the environmental issue is being treated by those who are seeking our votes. The importance of this very issue is so vital in that if the environment continues to deteriorate at its present rate, then all other issues will not even matter as our mother nature and its creatures (including human beings) will eventually cease to exist.

If the politicians seeking to govern our country are therefore sweeping this issue under the rug or are prioritizing corporate profits over environmental sustainability, then we should be very wary. They are not really promoting our interests but are simply looking at the short-term benefits of the mighty dollar and are obviously kowtowing to pressure from those with economic power.

### Immigration and Human Rights

It is trite to say that Canada is a country of immigrants. As such, immigration objectives and human rights values should lie at the very core of government laws and decision-making. Immigration policies and practices which reflect utmost fairness for those seeking admission, and genuine compassion for those displaced from their countries of origin by unfortunate circumstances, should be another absolute priority.

Although it is clear that human rights values should pervade every aspect of government policy and decision-making, immigration issues make it even more imperative to pay closer attention to how these values are actually enforced. A political party or candidate who simply mouths empty rhetoric without making concrete proposals for reform or whose track record is clearly inconsistent with these values, should not get our vote.

We should also be critical of short-sighted policies which fail to consider long-term social impact. These include programs which simply facilitate the entry of temporary foreign workers without providing adequate safeguards against worker exploitation (not only by employers but also by recruiters, consultants, etc.), prolonged family separation, settlement difficulties and even disqualification from permanent residency. These are the very same issues which continue to plague the Live-in Caregiver Program (LCP) where the vast majority of participants are from the Philippines. While we are grateful for the recent changes which have already benefited many caregivers and their families, much more needs to be done towards resolving the many other issues which continue to plague the LCP.

### Health and Social Welfare

Among the reasons that Canada has become a desirable place to live in is its generous health and social welfare system. However, it is also well-known that the system has been fast deteriorating. From a severe shortage of healthcare providers, to huge cuts in government spending, to frustrating bureaucratic delays – this area of governance is clearly in urgent need of drastic and effective reforms.

Instead of dismissing those who advocate for these programs as communists or alarmists, we must question the allocation of government resources, and determine if the priorities are properly placed on human well-being, rather than corporate interests.

### Economic Security

For many, this issue should be on top of the priority list as the state of the economy determines government budget allocation, taxation and other related matters. Yes, this issue is extremely important but it is equally important not to simply boil everything down to dollars and cents. Human lives and dignity are priceless. And the world's wealth are not meant to be hoarded by a select few. I strongly believe that there is enough wealth in the world to eliminate poverty and hunger, prevent illnesses and provide respectable homes to everyone. If the leadership will lead the way and apply true values of fairness and compassion, as well as genuine commitment to public service, then economic security will eventually be achieved, not just by a handful, but by the rest of the long-deprived majority.

These are but some of the extremely important general issues which I believe the politicians should clearly address in this election campaign. There will of course be other issues, more specific or less contentious, that are equally calling for attention.

It is therefore vital that we should not vote solely on the basis of charisma, oratorical skills, grandstanding, empty promises or worse, petty mudslinging, which sadly pervade election campaigns. Instead, we should carefully listen to what these politicians are really saying, probe into their motives and decide which party or candidate we believe, in good conscience, will work towards promoting our interests and those of future generations.

*The author is a lawyer in Toronto and may be reached at [deanna@santoslaw.ca](mailto:deanna@santoslaw.ca)*