

With the latest polls showing the Conservatives clawing their way back to a virtual tie with the Liberals (and the NDP fading away, it seems), it will be interesting to see if there are new forces that will sway public opinion over the Christmas season.

Just as the issue of inequality entered quietly into the field of vision for policy observers last week, 'innovation' is currently rising up as a topic of interest. Two items expose very different views of the issue. One, a rating of nations from the World Economic Forum, shows Canada slipping to 15th place out of 144 nations. The Hill Times reports the reasons cited by the WEF for the drop:

"The WEF survey of Canadian stakeholders in the report indicate the "problematic factors" for doing business in contemporary Canada including the access to financing, the tax rates, an inefficient government bureaucracy, an insufficient capacity to innovate and restrictive labour regulations."

All-in-all, a clear call for more deregulation, lower corporate taxes, no rise in wages or benefits and 'smaller government'. In other words, more of the same that we're used to hearing from The Fraser Institute and other Hayek-inspired 'think tanks' that feed conservative policy-making.

Using the same report, another item in The Tyee says that in spite of a federal government that has bent over backwards to be friendly to corporations, "Our business elites got all they wanted. Still they fail to invest, innovate and compete." Links to these articles are below.

Veterans' Affairs continues to be a difficult issue for the Conservatives. It appears that they announced a \$200 million mental health initiative as a pre-emptive measure ahead of a critical report from the Auditor General that noted the difficulty vets were having in accessing mental health services. However, a couple of days after that announcement, it was revealed that the funding will be spread over 50 years, leading veterans and their advocates to call the government's announcement 'misleading'.

Finally, the world price of oil continues to drop, and with it, the Conservatives' surplus. The implications for their boutique tax cuts are becoming more significant.

Our messages to the public:

Stephen Harper's Conservatives Fail Canadian Veterans

The Globe and Mail has revealed that the Conservative government's recently announced funding for veterans' mental health services will in fact be stretched out over the next 50 years - not six, as was originally announced by Conservative Ministers.

Over the last decade, 160 Canadian Armed Forces members have died by suicide, and many more struggle with mental health issues. Yet as the Auditor General pointed out this week, one veteran in five is forced to wait up to eight months for help from this government.

We have a sacred obligation to those who serve and their families. Liberals' priority is ensuring our veterans have nothing less than the best of care and support from a grateful nation.

Items of interest from the news and the party:

-The Hill Times proposes that 'innovation' should be an election issue:

<http://www.hilltimes.com/news/policy-briefing/2014/12/01/is-innovation-an-election-issue/40417>

-As noted above, the World Economic Forum's international innovation ratings show that Canada is lagging, and calls for more Conservative-style measures:

<http://www.hilltimes.com/news/policy-briefing/2014/12/01/canadas-global-innovation-standing--continues-to-drop-says-world/40438>

-Meanwhile, The Tyee takes aim at Corporate Canada, which in spite of federal government support, has failed to respond with more employment, investment and innovation:

http://thetyee.ca/Opinion/2014/12/01/Canada-Job-Future-Sinking/?utm_source=daily&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=011214

-Ralph Goodale has observed that the federal government has gone silent on its centerpiece income splitting initiative as costs of the policy begin to mount:

<http://ralphgoodale.ca/blog/costs-income-splitting-adding/>

-The Veterans Affairs file is in a mess with over \$1 billion of their budgets unspent over the last seven years, the Auditor General critical of the department's performance on the mental health issue, a measure to improve those services deemed 'misleading' and the Minister Responsible, Mr. Fantino, out of the picture:

<http://www.vancouversun.com/Tandt+Canadian+veterans+deserve+better/10413370/story.html>

<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics/veterans-fund-of-200-million-to-be-spent-over-the-next-50-years/article21821944/>

-It should be noted that one of the first things the Conservatives did upon forming a majority government in 2011 was to cut the Veterans Affairs budget:

<http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/veterans-affairs-to-cut-budget-by-226m-1.1002213>

-Even with that budget cut, over \$1 billion in funding for veterans' services went un-spent while the number of vets with mental issues increased by 600% over the last 12 years:

<http://news.nationalpost.com/2014/11/20/harper-government-accused-of-fattening-budget-surplus-as-125m-in-foreign-aid-not-spent/>

<http://thechronicleherald.ca/editorials/1253627-editorial-medical-maze-for-veterans>

-The Sun News channel (AKA Faux News North) was highly critical of Preston Manning for suggesting the need to price carbon emissions:

<http://www.pressprogress.ca/en/post/video-sun-tv-smears-preston-manning-speaking-out-climate-change>

These are just some of the items in the news...much more can be found on our Seniors Commission Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/bclibs/> If you do not have access, please e-mail me for an invitation to this group.

Looking ahead:

Justin Trudeau will join Joyce Murray as headliners at a big fundraising event on December 15th at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in Vancouver. You can book your tickets here:

<http://events.liberal.ca/Event/an-evening-with-joyce-murray-and-justin-trudeau-in-vancouver.aspx?Lang=en>