

Well everyone, here we are at the end of 2014 and the countdown (be it long or short) to the federal election has stepped up a notch or two. Rather than the usual material and analysis, this week I'd like to offer some of my own observations for the coming months.

First, with respect to the election call, we should be watching for saturation advertising (taxpayer funded) promoting the government's programs, particularly the tax cuts, over the next 45 to 60 days. The presentation of the 2015 budget, which will include those measures, may well be used as a lever to call an early election; a safe guess is that PM Harper will want the vote immediately before the start of the Mike Duffy trial in early April. We need to be ready for this and then if the vote isn't until October we'll be that much better prepared.

We have all noticed that the Conservatives have performed well in the most recent polls, pulling even with the Liberals while the NDP's support is sliding. These polls are always suspect due to methodology and, especially, because they can't really predict the turnout at the ballot box. However, the trend toward a strengthening of the Tories' support has been constant across all of the polling company results. What is particularly important is to note that the majority of seniors are said to support the Conservatives, and we know that this group does tend to vote. As seniors ourselves, a critical contribution we can make is to focus on outreach to our fellow seniors.

There are two aspects of this outreach: First, to begin a discussion with seniors on what they want their next government to do, and secondly to mobilize our party's supporters to vote.

With respect to the first part, the National Seniors Commission is developing a survey that zeros in on key issues for seniors and then asks them to complete the statement: "I expect the next government to: _____." The roll-out of this survey will be designed to 'ripple' across our communities. It will start with us, but we will be asked to forward it to people we know along with a request for them to pass it along to their friends, family and neighbours. The initial outreach will be online, but printed material can be produced that we can take to meetings with seniors groups.

This survey process will serve a number of purposes. It will make our contact with seniors all about *them* and what they think, rather than about trying to sell the Liberal Party platform. In fact, the National Commission's intention is to use the results of this survey to influence the Party's platform, and as Liberals we will be seen as open and engaging. The process gives us an easy way to reach out and involve more people in a conversation, and such grass roots activities will have a great impact on voter turnout and the end result.

The need to mobilize our supporters to vote is critical. Recently, a very large nomination campaign with two very determined candidates saw over 20,000 memberships sold, with a very even split between them. The difference was that while one candidate had a turnout of over 60% of his supporters, only 20% showed up for the other guy. We don't want to be that other guy. In a recent online discussion, the idea came up to create a 'buddy system', much as we were instructed to do when we went swimming. If every committed supporter actively encourages another person to vote -- literally holding their hand and leading them to the polling station -- our next government won't be elected to serve only 30 per cent of Canadians. It's just one idea and we will look to you for others.

So, as we wrap up this year and launch 2015, watch for more details on the national survey, make sure you participate in it, and be thinking about who else we can reach out to for input and answers. Each connection will have greater potential to turn into a vote.

With that, here's to us for a Very Happy New Year!