

## In a democracy, it's the job of seniors to stay in touch (03, 11, 12)

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Some of you may have noticed that there appears to be signals that an election is occurring south of the border. Since our TV set is able to capture signals from many U.S. stations, we enjoy the privilege of watching not only Dancing with the Stars but also presidential advertising and commentary ad nauseum. The amount of money spent in this latter pursuit is obscene. It exceeds the GNP of many third-world countries!

To get elected to office in the U.S., you must have access to tons of money. Fortunately, the U.S. Supreme Court which has more conservative than liberal judges has made it possible for PAC's (political action committees) to spend as much money as a drunken sailor on either candidate, but must not be in direct contact with that candidate. (Sure.) In Canada, Jean Chretien sought to limit donation money, but that has also been overturned.

Here is how it works in the U.S. There are two parties named the Republicans and Democrats much like the two parties in the Civil War, the Union and Confederate states. These two parties control Congress and the Senate. Unlike the Senate in Canada, American senators are elected and powerful, able to offset the Congress if they so decide. Of course, Congress can do the same, and a stalemate results. This has been the case for the past two years as neither party seems likely to cooperate with their adversary. The president is the lucky guy who tries to act like a musical conductor in an effort to harmonize the two groups. Lots of luck!

What has this got to do with seniors? Plenty. The incumbent is running on a platform that seeks to ensure fair taxation to the middle class and seniors. He is also determined to protect universal health care which seniors need. A year ago, 30 million Americans had no access to health care. That's slightly below the population of Canada!

His opponent wants tax deductions for the rich because another president named Ronald Regan suggested that money trickles down from the rich to the poor. Think of a rich guy living in a castle. He is consuming a terrific meal and some of the crumbs fall or trickle down to the floor where his dog is conveniently located. The dog ingests the crumbs and so fortified, is good to go for another day.

Do seniors in Canada need fear this scenario? Well, there are similarities with parties that are conservative and liberal, but unlike our American friends, we also have a few extra parties, one of which is committed to a healthy environment and another to policy that has more positive social outcomes.

In the United States, money rules the day, and the two parties basically take turns running the government. In Canada, money is becoming more important, but we have parties that muck up the ability of the liberals and conservatives to take turns. Yes, this is how it has mainly happened, but occasionally a third party gets in.

The problem is that democracy is not an easy process. And it constantly requires attention. That's why we have newspapers and newscasters, but it's the job of seniors to stay in touch. To make an educated choice. Otherwise, you get the representation that you deserve.

In the U.S., 84% of seniors who are registered to vote indicate that they will "definitely" vote. The voter identification law has been overruled as it unduly affects seniors and the poor.

Unfortunately, Americans do not get as much choice as we do.



When I reflect back on how my father and mother used to vote, it's a little scary. My mother liked anyone with nice teeth and a big smile. That was it! I think my dad favoured the guy who sponsored my hockey team. This must really annoy those political gurus who control the millions of dollars in advertising revenue. I sure hope they feature politicians with big smiles who attend minor hockey games! In November we will see how it all turns out.

