

Youth needs to plug into the democratic process

The low voter turnout for the last federal election brought attention to the young Canadians who have become all too noteworthy for abandoning the democratic system.

We “young ‘uns”, as some superior-minded elders will refer to us, are chastised for not acting in our democratic system. Instead we are painted as uncaring, apathetic individuals, more interested in expensive electronics and popular fashion.

The truth is that young people feel disenfranchised by political parties who only cater to the middle-age and senior populations. Give us a party that will respect opinions and ideas of young Canadians, not a party that will regard us as children or ignore us all together. But do Canadian youth not vote because politicians avoid them, or do politicians avoid us because we don't vote? This is the question.

The Conservative Party, our new, but same government, has the

youngest MP in all of Canada, so you'd expect them to aim some of their policies towards young Canadians. But instead, the Conservative plan introduces laws that treat Canadian youth like children who need protection while simultaneously allowing them to be jailed just like adults.

The most prominent mention of “youth” in the Conservative election platform was the policy that imposes adult life sentences on Canadians as young as 14 and no longer shields their identity in the press.

But at the same time, the Conservatives have promised to raise the age of sexual consent from 14 to 16. This mixed message states that Canadian youth are too young to have sex, but old enough to go to an adult prison for life.

It would seem that the Conservatives have adopted the idea that we “young ‘uns” just need to be whipped into shape with strict laws to make us model citizens.

But while we are expected to walk the line, youth are largely ignored by the Conservative platform that is filled mostly with tax cuts for businesses, and middle and upper income families.

Harper has promised billions for industry across Canada, including the aerospace industry the automotive industry, the forest and fishing industries and mining and oil companies. This is in addition to \$200 billion in tax cuts for business, first-time homebuyers, married couples, and seniors.

But for young Canadians, who are probably saving money for university tuition instead of a new house, there is no mention of post-secondary funding, or low-income tax breaks in the Conservative platform.

Instead the Conservatives continue to favour environmentally unfriendly businesses by lowering the tax on diesel, making it easier to build pipelines through Canada's north and opening Canada's borders to international uranium mining companies.



These initiatives are a few good examples of the attempt by the Conservative party to ignore current environmental crises. It's business as usual as the Conservatives claim environmental acts such as the Kyoto Accord would be far too expensive, while polluting and destroying the world's environment is free.

Since coming to power Stephen Harper has done his best to avoid the Kyoto Accord, calling it "job-killing" and "economy-destroying". Instead of stepping up and cutting 1990 levels of greenhouse gas emissions by 6 per cent by 2012 as stated in Kyoto, Harper's plan is to cut greenhouse gases by only 3 per cent by 2020.

This record is by far the weakest environmental move by any Canadian political party, with the Liberals vowing to cut emissions by 20 per cent by 2020, and the Green Party by 30 per cent by 2020.

As the leaders of our nation, the Conservatives have abandoned any real kind of Canadian effort to combat climate change, and have stalled and sabotaged international efforts attempting to make real progress.

As a young Canadian, it's hard not to worry about the future of our country and our planet, especially when our current governing party chooses to ignore the problems we face in favour of just continuing the way we've always done things. More than ever we need leadership that will pull the oil-

filled syringe from the vein of our country, not only to limit the effects of climate change, but also to ensure safety to our economy and standard of living.

Nearly everything you buy is built using energy from fossil fuels and then shipped hundreds if not thousands of miles before it reaches you. The majority of our consumer products, coming from China, India or Indonesia, can only reach us because of our access to cheap fuels. Our entire economic system relies on this, and as fossil fuels become more expensive it is absolutely necessary that we develop renewable energy to take its place. If we don't, it's hard to imagine how tomatoes would make it the 3300 km to Manitoba from California, or how coffee beans would make it 5500 km from Columbia.

With all these issues on the plate, it's hard to understand why voter turnout in the recent federal election was only 59 per cent - the lowest ever. And as youth, we are probably the largest culprit behind this record-breaking display in voter apathy.

It's understandable that the youth of Canada feels alienated from their political system. It's a system that has catered to the generations preceding us – our parents – but has yet to consider us precisely because we don't vote.

However, if young Canadians ever want to be heard, we have to start caring about the world outside of ourselves. We have to accept that

the only way we will have a say is if we become politically engaged; we must develop opinions on the breaking issues of our day, and demand action from our politicians.

But most of all, we have to abandon the ridiculous notion that being apathetic or "not caring" is something far cooler than being politically involved. By giving up your political expression, you are abandoning your fellow humans and instead vouching for a self-centered existence.

It is time that we buck the trend of a youth infatuated with meaningless possessions and cheap entertainment. Instead, just look at the world around you, and take the initiative to learn about it. It's as simple as that.

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