

Federal Election Forum 2019

By Sharron Callahan, NLPSPA President/Chair NL Coalition

It rained and rained on the evening of September 25 and I must confess that my spirits were dampened knowing that poor weather and darkness are often factors that keep folks in the comfort and warmth of their homes. BUT, that was not the case that evening, as Hampton Hall at the Marine Institute was full, telling me that folks were very concerned about the issues impacting seniors and wanted to hear what the candidates seeking election to the House of Commons would be offering in response to these key matters. With 2019 being a busy year with both provincial and federal elections and given our NLPSPA/Coalition sixteen town hall meetings conducted during April and May before the provincial election, there was worry that folks might have had enough “electioneering”.

Planning for this Forum began early in the summer and continued right up to the very last minute. A planning team was put into place and a suitable location was booked. Much research was undertaken to identify the key issues to be selected for address and for this we were able to draw upon the national platforms of CARP, ACER-CART, and NAFR and to intertwine these with what our knowledge and experience had been telling us were key concerns for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

In the end, we were able to have five political parties represented: Jack Harris, NDP; Terry Martin, Conservative; Ben Ruckpaul, Peoples’ Party of Canada; Greg Malone, Green Party; and Nick Whalen, Liberal. The moderator for the evening was Ed Hancock, a well known and respected educator, leader, chairperson, and parliamentarian, who did a superb job of keeping the program moving and the candidates to their allotted times. .

A set of prepared questions was circulated in advance to the candidates and the evening was conducted by a fair process where each candidate had two opportunities to be the first responder on a question. While time did not permit the opportunity for questions from the floor, the candidates did remain and circulate for a time after the Forum to greet the audience, shake hands, press their platforms, and welcome votes for themselves.

The questions posed were:

National Pharmacare:

1. Will your party implement, without delay, a universal, public, comprehensive, accessible, and portable National Pharmacare Program?
2. Two of the obstacles to the implementation of a comprehensive and universal Pharmacare system are competing provincial interests and intense oppositional pressure from pharmaceutical companies and their lobbyists. How will your party ensure that these and other obstacles will not impact the implementation of a universal, public, comprehensive, accessible, and portable National Pharmacare Program?

National Seniors Strategy:

1. Will your party implement a National Seniors Strategy that is inclusive of and addresses health care infrastructure, caregiver support, aging at home, home care, long term care, and age-friendly communities, and includes clearly stated expected results and accountabilities, with dedicated funding?

2. As a part of this National Seniors Strategy, will your party lead a national conversation on elder abuse by creating a national awareness campaign on elder abuse, neglect, and self-neglect, including the institutional and systemic abuse of frail citizens?
3. Also, as a part of this National Seniors Strategy, will your party take a lead role in ensuring that universal and inclusive Standards for in-home, community care and long term care that address staffing levels, staff training standards, standards of hygiene and nutrition, records and documentation, and use of restraints, and others are included?

Secure Retirement Income:

1. What is your party's retirement income security plan for current and retired seniors?
2. Will your party bring forward legislation that protects employees and retirees in the event of employer bankruptcy?
3. With the new expanded CPP contributions and higher CPP payments, it is possible that these higher payments could result in higher claw-backs in GIS, which could have low income workers now paying higher contributions only to lose or lower their GIS eligibility. It is unfathomable that one Government income security program could negatively impact another without due thought or consideration to the implications. Will your party examine the threshold of maximum income (OAS, CPP, and GIS) to remove barriers for additional benefits, given that the levels of income are fast falling behind the cost of living and by extension, give assurance to Canadians that the enhanced CPP will not negatively impact the other program benefits?

Veterans and Their Families:

1. What is your party's plan to ensure that veterans and their families receive the care, tools, and supports they need to live healthily and well?

It is one thing to hear promises, but the time for accountability begins once the election is over and it is incumbent upon all of us to ensure that those who form the Government of Canada for the next four years implement the programs that we have lobbied so hard for, that were promised, and for which our elected officials are now responsible.

NLPSPA and the NL Seniors Coalition extends a very special vote of thanks to all those who helped make this Forum a success: Sharron Callahan (NLPSPA/CARP/Coalition), Neil Moores (NLPSPA), Robert Howard (RNCVA), Mike Siscoe (CARP), Doreen Noseworthy (RTANL), Winston Fiander (NAFR), Ann Marie Cleary (NLPSPA) Mary Cleary (NLPSPA), and Ralph Morris (NAPE/NLPSPA). Everyone had their own assigned tasks and many hands did make light work. Thank you until next time.