

MAY 2011 Special Election Edition

This edition of *The Interim Plus* is devoted to the ongoing election process. Its content is designed to help teachers of various social science courses to integrate the federal election campaign into their lesson planning.

These curriculum ideas are flexible and lend themselves to use for one-period lessons or for a series of classes as circumstances permit. The study of the nature of Canada's election process and the issues that are brought forth by the public, media and political parties during the campaign itself can be an exciting introduction for young people to the electoral process in a modern democracy.

Some of this material is reprinted from past editions of *The Interim Plus* pertaining to national elections (see September 2008)



Why we have elections

Canada is legally a **constitutional monarchy** with a monarch as titular Head of State. This means that in a ceremonial sense the Queen, Elizabeth II is the reigning monarch, but she rules through her representative in Canada, the Governor-General. As such Canada enjoys a **parliamentary, representative government** with a Prime Minister who rules and exercises power.

Because of history and geography Canada is a **confederation**, meaning that it has two major levels of government according to the British North America Act. There is a national government with its headquarters in Ottawa and there are provincial and territorial governments. Each level of government has its own distinct powers and responsibilities.

There is one Parliament for the whole country. The actual or practical ruler in Canada is a **Prime Minister** who functions as the monarch's chief minister and whose advice she and her representative (the Gover-



nor-General) must accept according to long established parliamentary traditions.

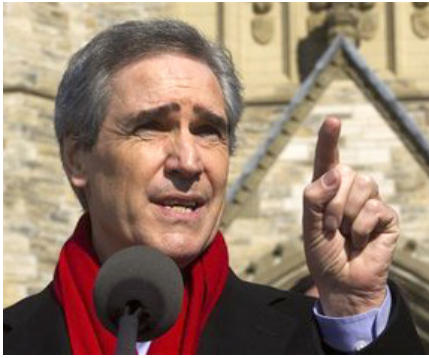
Canada's Parliamentary System boasts three branches of government: the **executive** consisting of the Prime Minister and his Cabinet and the Prime Minister's Office; the **legislative** branch which introduces and passes the laws (two chambers, the **House of Commons** whose 308 members are elected by the people in various rid-

ings (designated representative districts) from across the country, based on population and according to allotment by province, and the **Senate**, having 104 members who are **appointed** by the Governor-General upon the recommendation of the Prime Minister; and the **judicial** branch, consisting of the Supreme Court of Canada and corresponding provincial Superior Courts. It is their responsibility to interpret the constitutionality of laws passed by the legislative branch in light of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms passed in 1982.

The **Prime Minister** is a member of House of Commons and is **the leader of the political party that obtains the majority of the parliamentary seats or ridings** as a result of a national election. The leader of that winning party is invited to form a "government", that is, to choose a Cabinet to run the affairs of state and to be held responsible by the House of Commons. The Prime Minister governs through a **Cabinet**, a group of elected officials who head up various departments of government like defense, health & welfare, justice, transport, finance, immigration, etc.

Political parties compete in elections for the privilege of governing. The party that wins the greatest number of seats gets to form that government. A change in government occurs either as a result of a national election or as the result of a **vote of confidence** in the House of Commons. This is what occurred on March 25 when the





three opposition parties rejected the budget presented by the Conservative government, thus precipitating the current election campaign.

If there is no clear majority following an election there are two choices possible: the original Cabinet can resign and the leader of the largest opposition party can be asked to form another Cabinet that would enjoy the confidence of the majority of the members of the House of Commons. Or, the original Cabinet can stay in office and meet the newly elected House hoping to enjoy its confidence. If the majority of the members in the House of Commons vote “no confidence” then the “government” is deemed to have been defeated, thus triggering an election prematurely. Since an election would have just been held, in this case the Governor-General would ask the leader of the next largest party to attempt forming a government. This is the scenario that could result in a **coalition** government, where there is power sharing among the parties forming the coalition.



Traditionally a Member of Parliament is elected for a 5-year term of office. **Members of the Cabinet** (whether federal or provincial) have no fixed “term”. Instead every federal cabinet minister serves at the pleasure of the Prime Minister

and all of them must be or become members of the Queen’s Privy Council for Canada. The Cabinet has sole power to prepare and introduce bills providing for the expenditure of public money or imposing taxes on the population.

If one or more cabinet ministers do not agree with a policy or action of the Government they must either resign, or accept it and defend the policy. This is known as the principle of “cabinet solidarity”.

General information about our system of government can be found at

www.parl.gc.ca/information/library/ldb/forsey/author-e.asp

www.parl.gc.ca/Information/about/education/resources/index-e.asp

Questions to Consider

1. Is the Canadian government system democratic? (see also the article below penned by Fr. Raymond de Souza)
2. What are the strength and weaknesses of the Parliamentary system?
3. What factors likely play important roles in how and who the Prime Minister chooses for the Cabinet?

Do we still have a real democracy?

There is a growing cynicism when it comes to the question of democratic deficits. Some pundits extol the solid enduring qualities of our parliamentary system, while others point to an increasingly undemocratic streak threatening our cherished traditions. The latter fear is echoed in the article that appeared in the *National Post*, March 31, 2011, penned by Father Raymond J. De Souza:

The real democratic deficit

‘This election isn’t just an exercise in democracy,’ said Michael Ignatieff on Saturday. ‘It will be about democracy itself.’

Later that day, Ignatieff appointed the Liberal candidate for the Toronto riding of Scarborough Rouge River. Incumbent Liberal MP Derek Lee had announced his retirement on Friday, indicating that his replacement would be announced on Saturday. A done deal. No nomination meeting. No open process.

The Liberals in Scarborough may not have expected much more. Back in 1993, Derek Lee himself was being challenged for the nomination by a 40-year-old bus driver who had worked hard signing up thousands of new members. Jean Chrétien intervened, aborting the local selection process and appointing Lee as the candidate.

Ignatieff highlighted on Saturday the Harper government’s contempt for Parliament. What about contempt for one’s own party members?

The loss of local democracy is not a Liberal phenomenon, even if Chrétien was a pioneer in its demise.

In the spring of 2009, just months after the last election, the Conservatives decided that due to the precarious situation of their minority government, incumbent MPs had to be protected against the messiness of local democracy. Simply to appoint all 140-some incumbents would have been a step too far, so a shameless and unworthy scheme was employed instead. A mailer was sent to all current party members in ridings with incumbent MPs, asking them whether they wished to have a

nomination meeting. If two-thirds of the entire membership returned their ballots in favour a nomination, one would be held. If not, the incumbent automatically had the nomination...

For the full article go to

www.nationalpost.com/opinion/columnists/real+democracy+deficit/4532881/story.html

Questions

1. What does De Souza decry about the nomination process in local ridings?
2. Why is the “new” process not very democratic at times?
3. Are there any good arguments in favour of the party leader having a certain discretionary power over the process?

Activity I

Identifying the Key Issues in the 2011 Election

If issues are supposed to decide the outcome of elections, who determines what constitutes the key issues? Political parties build political platforms that ostensibly reflect party philosophy and principles as shaped and approved by party leaders, local party associations at national party conventions. Parties also conduct inter-

nal polling and use focus groups to help identify those issues that they feel will gather maximum support from the electorate. Parties rely partially on the media to promote their messages. The media in turn plays an important role by giving some issues prominence and ignoring some issues altogether.

As an election campaign unfolds there is a frenetic competition among the parties, through their spin doctors and media talking heads, trying to turn certain topics/problems/developments/gaffes into hot issues. The public can be swayed by the presentation of “the issues” and the debate of those “issues”. How does one keep track of what parties and candidates say about the issues? How can one make an intelligent decision in casting a ballot? Given the complexity of some of the issues and the opposing points of views it is a challenge to exercise one’s franchise intelligently. Then there is the role of polls and the influence that the release of such information may have on the election process. Many people never stop to take stock of what is being debated or reported. They either find it too confusing or they simply lose interest in the entire process.

There is lamentation about voter apathy among all sectors of the population. Since youth is relatively the most in-active segment, perhaps teachers can consider classroom activities that might make the whole election experience more meaningful to the students:

1. Divide the class into 5 groups and have each group track the Canadian election campaign.
2. The groups create a chart (or use the one on the next page) on which they record the positions of the major Canadian leaders and parties, Stephen Harper and the Conservatives, Michael Ignatieff and the Liberals, Jack Layton and the NDP, Gilles Duceppe and the Bloc, Elizabeth May and the Green Party, and any other party thought to be significant nationally.
3. Have students research the issues as reported in news-magazines, newspapers, television, radio, internet sites and blogs run by various organizations with distinctly partisan views. Have students also consider other issues that do not make it onto the main radar screen and inquire as to why that may be.
4. Groups can divide the task further by getting each member to concentrate on 2 issues each and become trackers par excellence on those issues.
5. Each group presents its summary.
6. Each group should note whether their particular summary includes or excludes issues found in that of the other groups, and if so let the group explain what may account for the differences.
7. Refer students to the *2011 Federal Election Guide* found at http://www.cccb.ca/site/images/stories/pdf/2011_Federal_Election_Guide.pdf and have them analyze the different party platforms (policies, promises) in light of the guiding principles in that document. Record how the party stances on various issues compare to the principles/teachings of the bishops’ guide. Take careful note of life issues. According to Campaign Life Coalition spokespersons (Jim Hughes, Mary Ellen Douglas, Jeff Gunnarson) elections are often a tacit conspiracy where the five main parties adopt platforms that are “silently pro-choice”. Is there truth to the charge? If so, why do the parties act in this way?



Election Issues Tracking Chart

Issue	Conservative	Liberal	NDP	BLOC	Bishops' guide
Health care					
Foreign Policy (Afghanistan, Libya, etc.)					
Crime and justice					
Political reforms, scandals					
Education Tuition,					
The Economy (jobs, taxes, cost of living, poverty)					
Coalition vs. Majority					
Help for families Split income, day care spaces					
Government Programs and services					
Life Issues Abortion, euthanasia aging, pornography					
Environment, cap and trade, energy production					
Other issues					



Activity II

As mentioned above, political apathy abounds in Canada as only 55% to 70% of the electorate bother to vote in general elections. Schools can help to elevate political intelligence among youth by encouraging students to become involved. Consider these suggestions and incorporate one of them into a lesson plan or individual assignment.

1. Students can volunteer to help out in the local election campaign headquarters for the candidate of their choice (telephoning, mailing out literature, delivering brochures, stuffing envelopes, putting up lawn signs, etc.) and then write a report on their experience. Or the student might do an interview with a candidate's campaign manager or other available staffer.
2. Role-play a television news interviewer. Prepare interview questions for the local candidate or the national leader based on research of the candidate's background and stand on important issues. Use the video taping capabilities of the communications department in the school. Prior to the role-playing, brainstorm and discuss what makes a good interview question. Point out that open-ended questions elicit more information than closed-ended questions (questions that require a yes/no or one-word answer). For example, if a reporter only has time to ask one question, which question would be more effective?
 - a) *Do you care about national defense?* or
 - b) *If you were elected, would you vote to withdraw our soldiers from Afghanistan immediately?*
 - c) *What is your view on abortion?* or
 - d) *Are there any circumstances under which you believe a woman should have access to abortion?*
 - e) *How is your campaign going?* or
 - f) *What is your stand on a national day care program?*

Activity III

Video Recording the Candidates During the Election Cycle

Democracy cannot function properly without an informed and active citizenry. People must be free to express their political preferences. But people should also take their responsibilities seriously, becoming sufficiently informed so as to cast an informed vote at elections. The reality is that votes are cast on a variety of issues and for a variety of motives. But even the most interested and well-informed citizen cannot always make it to an all-candidates' meeting where voters have the personal opportunity to interact with and ask questions of the local candidates. Young people can help these voters become informed and at the same time contribute to the democratic process by video re-

cording 'all-candidates' meetings, and then posting the video on You Tube or sending it to an organization like Campaign Life Coalition (to jack@campaignlifecoalition.com) that has the capacity to collect and disseminate such videos as part of their efforts to educate the public on life issues in particular. In fact, students can become citizen-reporters by engaging in this exercise.

The activity could be done through groups or by individuals. It could be an independent study unit for the individual student. Considerations should include: equipment needed; obtain learn dates of all-candidates' meetings; prepare questions; decide on who will ask the questions; form of evaluation for the activity.

Media's Role in Elections: Telling the People "What's Going On"

Media coverage can influence election campaigns. The public needs to understand how much the media affects their opinions and be able to screen the media and look at the issues more objectively.



CBCtelevision

In Canada the media bias may be somewhat subtle. Although radio and television stations claim to be neutral they often exhibit a left-of-center stance. In fact, at the start of the current election campaign a controversy has arisen regarding the CBC's interactive polling mechanism that is supposed to help voters determine which party is most in line with their own values and interests. The COMPASS POLL can be taken by each individual. It can be found at <http://www.cbc.ca/>, just click on Vote Compass. This particular polling survey has created a stir, with many claiming that the program is skewed to result in a Liberal affiliation no matter what answers the participant chooses.

There is another important role for the media, namely being the conduits for delivering a message to the voters through campaign ads. Political advertisements on TV have become one of the fastest growing sources of TV revenue during the elections. Television is one of the most influential forms of media and the candidates make use of this, blasting a single message to a mass audience, or tailoring appeals to local communities.

Media also create interest and hype by highlighting the results of opinion polls during the election campaigns. Some claim that they do not heed the polls since they are constantly changing, on the other hand some political operatives depend on these poll findings to





www.edgate.com/elections/
inactive/public_opinion_polls/

shape their campaigns and to change tactics according to these polls. There continues to be great controversy over the use of polls, their veracity or reliability, and their general influence on the electorate.



Questions to Consider

1. What do you think is the most important function of the media during an election?
2. How has the internet changed the election coverage of the established media? Has it changed the way that the political parties have structured their campaigns?
3. a) Compare and contrast the daily reporting of the major networks on their coverage of the Canadian election campaign respectively for any two-day period. (CBC, CTV, GLOBAL NEWS)
b) Are the reporters objective, or are they biased and intent on influencing the viewers? Use the reaction of various media to the leaders' debates as a case in point.
4. What is the role of public opinion polls? Are they just reporting opinions, or are they shaping peoples' minds? Should polling be banned during the last two weeks of a campaign?
5. Is the polling process manipulated? (see Ezra Levant article in the Toronto Sun, *CBC: Bias and secrecy*)
6. Why won't the Liberal-leaning broadcaster open up about survey? http://www.torontosun.com/comment/columnists/ezra_levant/2011/04/01/17832526.html
7. How much money do parties put into media/ad campaigns? Does money influence the results? Based on money spent, which party is most effective in the use of its finances?
8. Observe the political ads run by the different parties on television, the internet and in newspapers. What is the nature of the ads run by each party? Positive? Negative? Are they effective or a waste of money?
9. What makes a television political ad powerful and effective? Give examples.
10. If one were to judge coverage and presentations on the basis of civility, respect, honesty and a certain idealism – which media did the best job in delivering news and commentary about the election? Which did the worst? Explain your opinion.

Costs of Election Campaigns

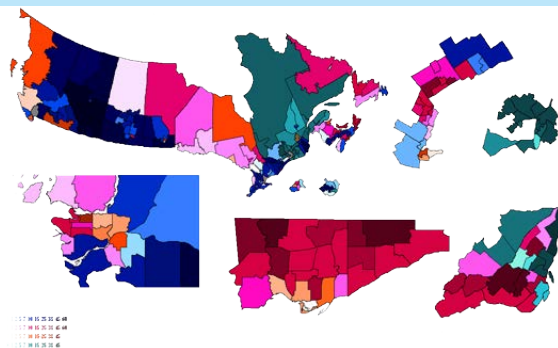


Many people question the ever-spiraling costs of holding elections and running for political office. It is estimated that the current Canadian election will cost \$300 million. Some observers fear that the future of democratic government is doomed since only the ex-

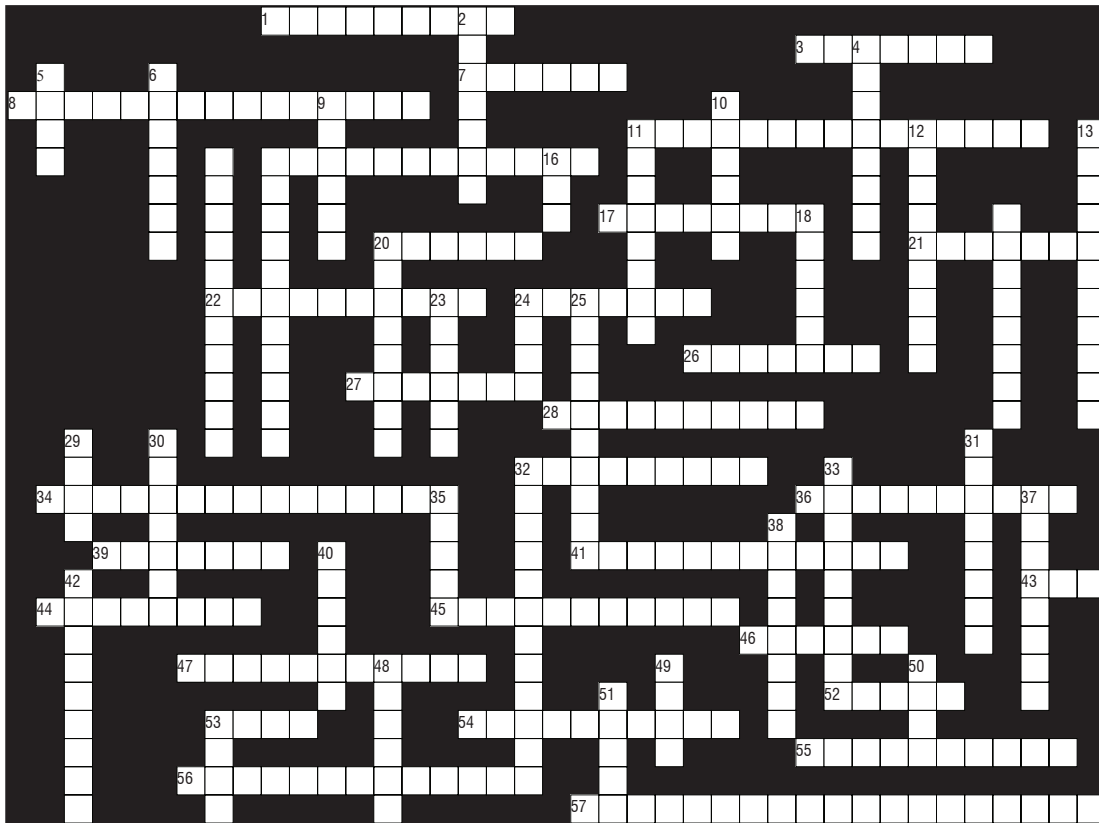
tremely wealthy can participate, or only people with huge financial backing of special interest groups or companies. The whole system stands to be corrupted by the influx of big sums of money. Others maintain with some justification that the internet has leveled the playing field somewhat, making it a more democratic source of numerous political donations. The internet makes it possible to reach millions of people who can contribute small amounts and thus affect the outcome of elections by their sheer numbers. And the internet through the social media offers even the less financially endowed parties and candidates the opportunity to reach huge numbers of citizen-voters.

Questions to Consider

1. How much do parties raise for election purposes? Which parties raise the most? Which parties spend the most? Try to get hold of a party letter in which the party asks for a donation. Note the tone of the letter. Is it emphasizing fear, hate, concern, partisanship?
2. What are the major sources of election finances?
3. Who are the biggest individual donors? Which are the largest corporate donors? Why do some companies donate to more than one candidate or more than one party?
4. Are there any controls on the amount of money that can be raised or the amount that can be spent, nationally or riding by riding?
5. What incentives would there be for individuals and companies to donate to political candidates or to political parties?
6. Is public tax money available to candidates running for office? Should it be? Why treat political donations more generously than charitable donations?



Elections Crossword Puzzle



Across:

- 1 - A person nominated to represent a political party during an election
- 3 - A specific piece of legislation
- 7 - The ability of voters in a constituency to remove their elected representative from office by means of a petition.
- 8 - _____ clause Section 33 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, allows federal or provincial legislatures to pass laws that may violate certain sections of the Charter
- 11 - A modern form of despotic rule in which the state undertakes to remake society according to an ideological design.
- 15 - an electoral district or riding with a body of electors
- 17 - visual representation of a person or concept
- 20 - a recognized expert source of opinion or analysis in some field like politics or sports
- 21 - a legal resident of a nation qualified to vote
- 22 - A system of government in which sovereignty is divided between a central government and several provincial or state governments
- 24 - the central room in which strategic decisions are made during an election campaign
- 26 - A self-sufficient group of individuals living together under common rules of conduct.
- 27 - A body of persons who head the executive departments of the government
- 28 - arising from the local, natural, spontaneously
- 32 - overwhelming victory by a party or candidate in an election, usually by a

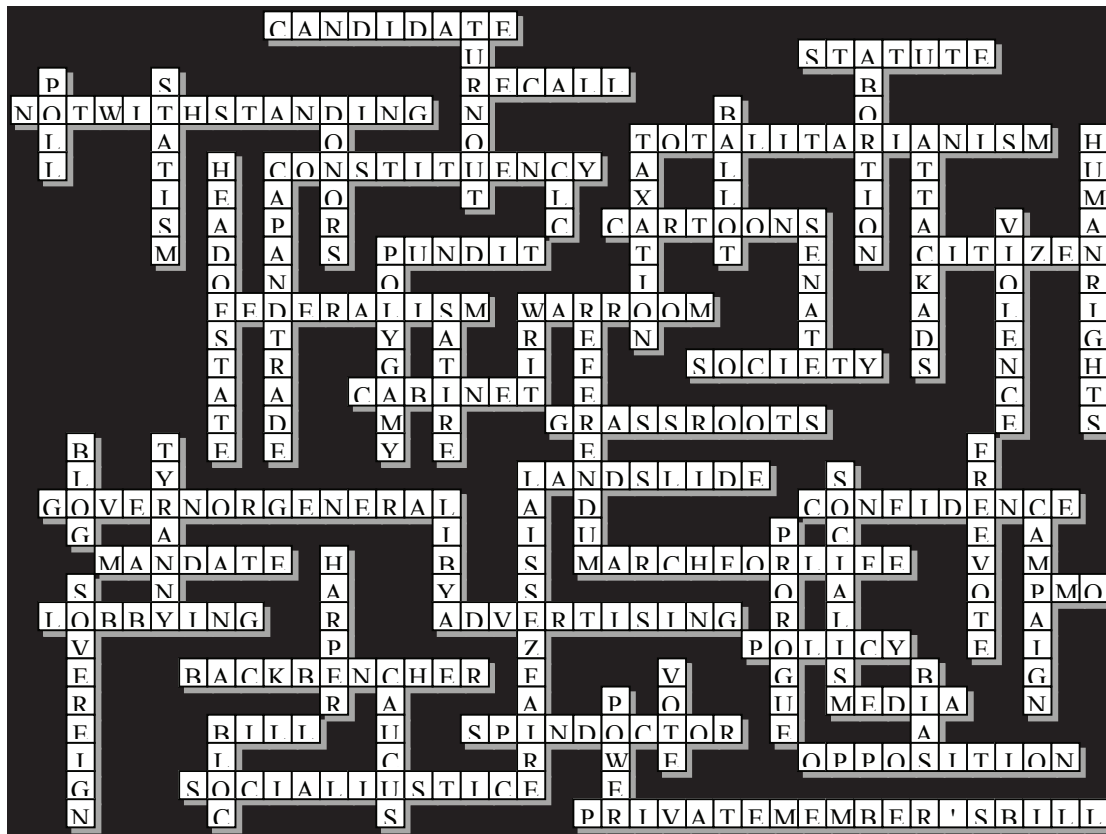
- plurality of more than 70% of the votes
- 34 - representative of the monarch in Canada
- 36 - Support for the government by the majority of the members of parliament.
- 39 - A permission or authorization given by voters to the elected government
- 41 - public manifestation in support of the unborn
- 43 - Support staff appointed by the Prime Minister to carry out political functions. abbrev.
- 44 - An activity of interest groups aimed at influencing governors and the public to achieve a favourable policy decision(s).
- 45 - purchased exposure of views and messages
- 46 - A plan of a government or political party intended to influence and determine decisions, actions, and other matters
- 47 - Member of Parliament on the govt. but not in cabinet, or those similarly distant from shadow cabinet posts in opposition parties.
- 52 - news reporting agencies, for example, television, radio, and the newspaper
- 53 - A piece of legislation under consideration by a legislative body.
- 54 - public relations person who publicizes a favorable interpretation of the words or actions of a political party
- 55 - Those members of Parliament who are not part of the government of the day.
- 56 - The partial equalization of wealth and income to reach a more desirable outcome.
- 57 - Public bills introduced in the legislature by members who are not in the cabinet.

Down:

- 2 - number of eligible voters that actually voted in an election
- 4 - an issue Party Leaders try to avoid
- 5 - a methodical sounding of opinions regarding a public issue, policy, personality, popularity of a leader or government or voter intentions
- 6 - The heavy intervention of the state in societal affairs, especially in the economic system.
- 9 - contributors of finances to political campaigns
- 10 - A sheet of paper or a card used to cast a vote
- 11 - government's power to take money legally from the populace
- 12 - aggressive, often simplistic messaging discrediting a political opponent
- 13 - rights thought to belong to all people simply because they are human beings.
- 14 - an individual who represents the state but does not exercise political power.
- 15 - Liberal campaign policy to reduce environmental carbon footprint
- 16 - abbrev for pro-life lobbying group
- 18 - appointed chamber of the Canadian parliament
- 19 - The utilization of physical force or power as a means of achieving ends.
- 20 - practice of having more than one wife at the same time
- 23 - the use of irony, sarcasm, ridicule, or the like, in exposing, denouncing, or deriding vice, folly, etc.
- 24 - official order authorizing an election
- 25 - A decision on policy proposals by a direct vote of the electorate.

- 29 - To write entries in, add material to, or maintain a weblog
- 30 - A form of government in which one person rules arbitrarily.
- 31 - A legislative vote in which members are not required to follow the party line
- 32 - the theory that government should not interfere in the direction of economic affairs
- 33 - leftist ideology that prescribes a large role for government to intervene in society and the economy via taxation and public ownership.
- 35 - country to which Canada sent fighter jets to protect civilians
- 37 - An operation pursued to accomplish success in an election
- 38 - To postpone, defer or even discontinue a session of a parliament
- 40 - current prime minister of Canada
- 42 - The highest or supreme political authority.
- 48 - A closed meeting of party members within a legislative body to decide on questions of policy or leadership
- 49 - A formal, legal expression of preference for a candidate for office or for a proposed resolution of an issue.
- 50 - a decided favouring of one particular viewpoint
- 51 - The ability to get other individuals to do as one wants them to do.
- 53 - political party devoted exclusively to Quebec interests at federal level

Crossword Solution



Yahoo! Forum for Teachers

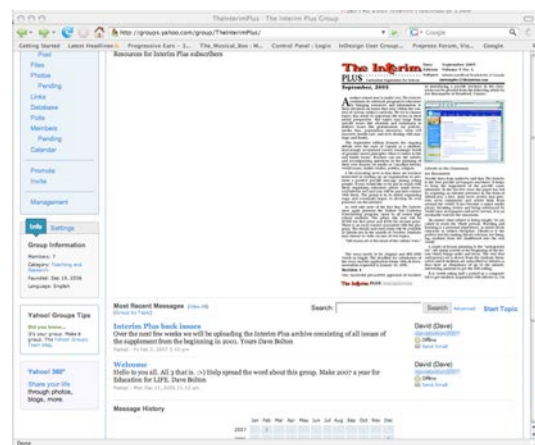
Lastly, we bring to teachers' attention the formation of a Yahoo! group to serve as a forum for pro-life educators to exchange ideas, views, and communicate their thoughts and teaching strategies on key life issues of the day. You are encouraged to join the group and make your own contributions. This is one simple way to expand the culture of life.

The address is:

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/TheInterimPlus/>

Please tell friends and colleagues about this new link for communicating with like minded educators. There is so much to be done and so few to do it, especially when the few do not realize how numerous they actually are because they are not in contact with one another. Nominate friends and fellow teachers. Send this call out to them.

Also, if you have a resource to share we will gladly post it for others to access.



How to join The Interim Plus via the group page:

1. Locate the group (<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/TheInterimPlus/>).
2. Click on the Join This Group button on front (home) page, as seen above.
3. If you are not signed in, you will be asked to enter your Yahoo! ID. If you do not have a Yahoo! ID, you can register by clicking on the Sign Up link.
4. Set your membership preferences. When you join, you can choose a profile you would like to display to the group, select the email address at which you would like to receive group messages, choose how you receive group messages, and more.