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Student apathy on the rise

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Gauntlet News

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It is a common stereotype that when young people hear the word "government" their eardrums automatically turn the conversation to mute while their eyelids slowly grow heavy. Apathy is a common symptom shared by many young Canadians today and is becoming widespread.

In the 2004 Canadian General Election, only 61 per cent of eligible voters showed up to cast their ballots. The percentage of voters between the ages of 18 and 24 is on average 20 to 30 per cent less than the national average, according to Elections Canada. The Globe and Mail asserted that in Canada's General Election in 2006, 57 per cent of young voters said they were going to vote, but only 44 per cent actually followed through with exercising this civil right.

In a recent survey performed at the University of Calgary consisting of 100 students chosen at random, 65 per cent of student participants indicated that they were definitely planning to vote in the upcoming Canadian General Election. In discussion, the main excuse most students gave for not planning to vote was inconvenience.

A report published by Elections Canada exposed that in the 2000 General Election, the main reason young adults chose not to vote was because they were "just not interested."

Federal Election 2008

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The vast group of students who claim they simply "do not know enough about politics to vote," and/or "don't know what each party even stands for" do not have to look far to solve the problem. There are plenty of websites aimed at informing the politically uninformed, including apathyisboring.com, a national non-partisan project that aims at reaching out past the political geeks and grasp a broader audience. It tries to engage youth with politics through things that many young people are actually interested in such as art, media and technology.

"It's about connecting the dots between technology and real life," said Ilona Dougherty, founder and executive director.

The website provides not only simple and straightforward information on what each political party stands for, but also information on how to vote and how to get involved.

"It's really realizing that literally everything we do from the moment we get up in the morning is affected by those people in power," Dougherty added.

Water is regulated by government, along with electricity and public transport. Students cannot afford to believe that government does not really affect them, said Dougherty.

There is concern that apathy among youth is not a "life cycle effect that will ammend in time, but that young people who do not vote are in fact embarking on a lifetime of self-imposed disenfranchisement," according to Elections Canada.

To connect students with political parties, the Dominion Institute recently implemented Youth Text 2008. Students can use cell phones to text a question or comment to the Conservative Party, the Green Party, the Liberal Party and the New Democratic Party and are guaranteed a response within 24 hours.

Students can take the first step to combat apathy by casting their ballot Oct. 14.

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