

Advocacy Update

Post-Election and the Road Ahead

As Canadians headed to the polls this fall and party leaders crisscrossed the country, many issues near and dear to independent booksellers were brought to the national stage. It was an interesting campaign where arts, culture and small businesses took a more prominent role in party platforms.

Funding and programs for culture were the subject of many debates across the country, and rallies and protests called Canadians to vote on this issue. As cultural enablers, this was a positive turn for booksellers.

Some notable ideas were floated around in this debate. The Green Party pledged to remove the GST on cultural products and services and the Bloc Quebecois suggested that the GST be eliminated specifically from the purchase price of a book. Both are positive ideas that would certainly give Canadians greater access to reading materials, but neither party is in a position to make these ideas a reality. However, we can all agree that at the very least, these platform mentions are a step in the right direction for us, as CBA has been for a long time calling on governments to reduce or remove taxation on reading materials.

As independent booksellers, you also need to take stock of what the parties had to say about taxes and programs for small business owners. Across the board, party leaders promised to assist small businesses in some capacity. The Conservatives pledged to raise the amount of tax deductions for small businesses, while the Liberals, NDP and the Green Party were committed to helping small businesses increase the effectiveness of their operations by reducing their carbon footprint.

The 37-day campaign resulted in Canada's third consecutive minority government. The final tally was: 143 Conservative seats, 76 Liberal seats, 50 Bloc Quebecois seats, 37 NDP seats, and two seats going to independents. While the Conservatives are now only 12 seats shy of a majority, there will still have to be some give and take by all sides of the House in order to get things done.

So what does this mean for booksellers across Canada? During the coming parliamentary session, it will be important to make sure culture and small business needs stay on the minds of our elected officials. A minority government usually means that your voice has a greater chance of being heard by all parties, so now is the time to proactively sustain this momentum.

Your best starting point is your local MP. Introduce yourself and give them a tour of your bookstore. Highlight the impact you have on your community and the issues that affect you the most. Make it your goal this year to build a relationship with your new MP or work harder to maintain your existing relationship with your returning MP.

Furthermore, don't be shy about keeping your MP in check. Keep notes of what he/she promised either during a campaign period meeting you had with him/her, or at a local debate. Down the road, you will be able to look back and inquire with them to see if these promises have been kept. You can also check party websites for their respective platforms. It's not a bad idea to save a copy of these documents on your computer, since some of the parties do take them down from their website when the campaign is over. If you have a copy, it will be a good reference point for future MP meetings.

As the new parliamentary session begins, it's important that we keep this momentum going. If our decision makers in Ottawa can come to truly appreciate and understand the significant role that independent booksellers play in communities across Canada, we will have a much smoother road ahead and Canadians will be better served.

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