

# Think like a beaver: Generation X-It <sup>[1]</sup>

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## EXCERPTS

It has become harder to raise a young family today in Canada, while it has become easier to retire. The generation raising young kids has less time at home because they work harder to compensate for stalled incomes that must now pay for housing prices that skyrocketed since 1976. By contrast, poverty is down dramatically for seniors, earnings are higher for those about to retire, and housing prices that nearly doubled in value are a major source of wealth for those who owned a home back in the 1970s and 80s. There is no doubt that the baby boom generation worked hard as parents, employees and business owners - and they deserve credit for this hard work. But boomers also lucked out because their adult years coincided with wage returns for education, and wealth accumulation through home ownership, patterns that don't continue nearly as much today for the generation raising young kids.

As a result, there is now significant intergenerational tension in Canada. But this doesn't mean boomers alone are responsible. Sun columnist Pete McMartin writes in good humour about "The attack of the retired baby boomers. Run for your lives." Yet the reality is that much responsibility for the bad intergenerational deal rests with the very generation raising young kids.

This is not to suggest the generation raising young kids is generally lazy. Statistics Canada data show that Canadians age 25-44 work more hours and provide more unpaid care than Canadians over 44.

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The main problem with the generation raising young kids, as I see it, is that too many bought into the name Generation X, and "X-ited" formal politics. It's almost a badge of honour now to proclaim our political laziness, maintaining that "Politics aren't about me" or "It doesn't matter if I vote."

And so we don't. We're a third less likely to vote compared with those older than 44. Indeed, we seem much more interested in who gets voted off some TV island than who gets voted to Victoria or Ottawa.

We may not worry about our X-ity from politics. But will our children? Might they not someday question why we didn't grow up politically to challenge the decline in the standard of living; to challenge the fact that an especially affluent generation of Canadians approaches retirement with some more intent on globe-trotting than on remedying the fiscal debt, the environmental debt, or the family policy debt they leave for those who follow?

The reality is that boomer politicians play politics well for their generation, reducing seniors' poverty, strengthening pensions and investing even more in medical care to treat illness at the end of life.

By contrast, the generation raising young kids doesn't play politics well, and we get a bad deal as a result.

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But we can't let our X-haustion get in the way of the solution. It's time to grow up politically. It's time to start demanding a New Deal for families with young kids.

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A blueprint for the New Deal is the focus of next week's column.

- reprinted from the Vancouver Sun

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