

Election 2018

BNI/Nanos N.B. poll: Fix health care first

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A new poll suggests that health care is the issue that New Brunswickers want to hear politicians talk about during the provincial election, followed by jobs and reducing debt, the deficit and overspending.

Meanwhile, a majority of New Brunswickers say the minimum wage in the province should be significantly higher.

Brunswick News has partnered with Nanos Research to provide a series of polls looking at the issues that matter most to the people of New Brunswick in advance of the Sept. 24

provincial election.

Nanos has been in the field asking New Brunswickers about what they want the provincial party leaders to address while on the hustings. A first wave of data, collected in the immediate aftermath of the start of the election runoff, suggests the issues that will decide the next government.

Asked to identify two important issues they want addressed by politicians vying for their vote, New Brunswickers most often mentioned health care – 23 per cent – as their top issue.

That was followed by jobs at 12 per cent and deficit and debt reduction – or the need to stop overspending – at 10 per cent. Seniors issues, the environment and climate change tied with five per cent each.

Responses raised nearly two-dozen different topics in total to the open-ended question.

Both taxes and education were raised just over four per cent of the time and bilingualism was a top issue for roughly four per cent of respondents.

Nanos conducted the online survey of 500 New Brunswick voters, 18 years of age or older, from Aug. 24 to 30. The study was commissioned by the Telegraph-Journal and the research was conducted by Nanos Research.

The survey was conducted in both English and French and weighed to reflect the province's demographic makeup.

“The reality is that in most election campaigns, the candidates look to control the debate,” public opinion pollster Nik Nanos said. “But doing this polling forces politicians to talk about what voters care about.

“The whole point of this is to make the voice of average New Brunswick voters part of the dialogue.”

The campaign runoff has produced several health care pledges.

Progressive Conservative Leader Blaine Higgs has promised that a Tory government will cut surgery wait times by 50 per cent over the course of a first four-year mandate, specifically addressing long waits for hip replacements, knee replacements, and gynaecological surgeries.

Concerns over an ongoing doctor shortage have also prompted the Liberals to come out with a recruitment strategy that would see them team up with the New Brunswick Medical Society to take over recruitment efforts from the province's two health authorities. The Liberals also want to set up five non-urgent care centres across the province for people who can't see a family doctor.

The Greens have announced they would scrap the province's contract with Medavie for managing extra-mural health services and place ambulance services under public management, among their health care pledges.

The New Democrats say they would immediately create a new government agency to provide home support services.

The People's Alliance has long called for merging the province's two health authorities to eliminate duplication, while providing service for both official languages based on need.

Meanwhile, a majority of New Brunswickers responding to the poll – just over two in three or 67 per cent – said that the minimum wage in the province should be significantly higher.

It currently sits at \$11.25 an hour.

Another 24 per cent said it seems about right, while three per cent said there should be no minimum wage. Seven per cent were unsure.

Complementing these results in the coming days will be a first-of-its-kind exercise by Nanos Research that will see the polling firm conduct social media monitoring during the election to get a further picture of what New Brunswickers are really talking about.

“The research is a mechanism to make sure and hold politicians to account,” Nanos said. “If people are worried about jobs, health care, the condition of roads, the polling puts a spotlight on that.

“As soon as you put a spotlight on that it puts pressure on politicians to start answering questions about those issues.”

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