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Here's the latest news from Britain's biggest, campaigning pensioners' organisation, the National Pensioners Convention (NPC)

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Ten Minute Briefing



April 2017

These new, ten minute briefings from the NPC aim to give you a quick analysis of the current debates surrounding older people in the UK.

Implications of the General Election

Introduction

Theresa May's surprise announcement on 18 April to call a snap General Election for 8 June raises a number of important issues for older people. These are considered in this briefing paper, based on the information currently available.

The Triple Lock

The state pension triple lock is likely to be a significant issue at the election, primarily because the Chancellor Phillip Hammond had already said he was going to review it after the 2020 General Election, and Labour said they would keep it. At this stage it is unclear what the other parties will do, but clearly not only the future of the triple lock will be determined by which party wins the election, but potentially also whether or not it is replaced before 2020.

Universal Pensioner Benefits

In their 2015 manifesto, the Conservative Party pledged to retain universal pensioner benefits such as the winter fuel allowance, free prescriptions and the concessionary bus pass. However, since that time there has been considerable pressure, particularly from think-tanks such as the Intergenerational Foundation and members of the Work and Pensions Committee to scrap some or all of these benefits in the name of "intergenerational fairness". It is unclear at this stage what the other parties will offer, but it is possible some changes will be proposed. It's worth remembering that under George Osborne, the government moved the free TV licence for the over 75s from the Department for Work and Pensions to the BBC, and it is likely the broadcaster will seek to cut this back from 2020.

Social Care

In the Spring Budget statement the Chancellor announced that the government would be publishing a Green Paper on the future funding of social care later this year. The Lib Dems have already set out a proposal for a new hypothecated tax to fund care services, whilst Labour has yet to make any announcement. Given that this is probably one of the most important issues now facing the older generation, it will be important that each of the parties spell out exactly how and when they are proposing to tackle the crisis in the care system.

Impact of Brexit

Part of the election propaganda is bound to be around the issue of Brexit, and what sort of final deal people want to see. Some of the issues affecting older people will focus on their right to receive their UK state pension if they live in an EU country, and whether the 80,000 EU workers currently employed in the care sector will be entitled to stay in Britain. At this stage, neither of these issues have been resolved.

Other issues

There are of course a whole host of other very important issues with which the NPC has been involved, but are unlikely to form a major part of any party political election campaign. These include:

- Affordable and suitable housing for older people
- The rights of older carers, including gaining entitlement to the Carer's Allowance
- New and specific legislation to outlaw elder abuse
- The impact of the bedroom tax on older tenants in social housing
- Issues around increases in the State Pension Age
- The unfairness of 'frozen' pensions for 500,000 UK pensioners living abroad
- Fuel poverty and the number of winter deaths among older people
- The effect of cuts to meals on wheels services
- The need for guards on trains to assist disabled and older travellers
- The 'digital divide' which discriminates against older people who are not online
- The negative portrayal of older people in some parts of the media

A Pensioners' Manifesto

In line with previous elections, the NPC will be producing and distributing a Pensioners' Manifesto which supporters can send to all the candidates across the UK over the next few weeks, and ask for their reaction. The NPC will also produce further information comparing the manifestos of each of the parties once they have been published.

The NPC manifesto will call for:

- A state pension set above the official poverty level, at around £200 a week and linked to the triple lock of the higher of earnings, prices or 2.5%.
- Greater funding for the NHS, an end to privatisation in the health service and a national social care system funded from general taxation that is free at the point of delivery and without means-testing.

- Maintenance of universal pensioner benefits such as free bus travel, a £500 winter fuel allowance, free prescriptions and a free TV licence for the over 75s.
- More homes that are both affordable and suitable for everyone, whilst recognising the specific barriers to downsizing that older people face.
- New legal protection for older people from all forms of elder abuse, to ensure dignity and raise standards of care.
- A Brexit deal that safeguards the payment of pensions, the EU health insurance card and the rights of those UK pensioners living abroad.

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