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JANE TABER AND THE GLOBE'S PARLIAMENTARY BUREAU SET THE AGENDA



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[May 2010](#)

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[March 2010](#)

[February 2010](#)

[January 2010](#)

[December 2009](#)

[November 2009](#)

[Older Posts](#)



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Health care back on front burner in poll

Jane Taber

Canadians are feeling comfortable with the state of the economy, so much so that for the first time since 2009 health care trumps it as the No. 1 issue of concern in a new poll.

This could even provide some opportunities for the opposition, provided that one of the parties puts a policy piece in the window.

The Nanos Research survey shows that 22.8 per cent of Canadians are concerned with health care – an issue that used to be so front and centre for Canadians – compared to 18.6 per cent who are concerned about the economy. Nearly 11 per cent of respondents are concerned about the environment compared to 5.4 per cent who fret about education.

What should be noted, too, is that respondents provided their answers unprompted. Pollster Nik Nanos attributes the results to a “diminished concern about the state and stability in the economy.”

He notes that there is a gender split with women more likely to be concerned about health care by about a margin of two to one, while men are worried about the economy.

“There are strategic implications for the federal parties with a potential change in voter focus,” Mr. Nanos says. “Traditionally, times of focus on economy tend to favour the Conservatives while a focus on social issues, such as health care, tend to favour the Liberals and NDP.”

So there are opportunities here for the Liberals, who have not seen their fortunes rise in the opinion polls of late despite their hammering of the governing Tories over the Guergis/Jaffer affair and the tussle over release of the secret Afghan documents.

Mr. Nanos warns, however, that a party must put forward some ideas and policy in order to capitalize on the mood of the electorate.

His poll of 1,003 Canadians was conducted between April 30 and May 3. It has a margin of error of plus or minus 3.1 percentage points, 19 times out of 20.
