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GREY IS THE NEW BLACK

I can't tell you how happy I was to read recently that our former prime minister, Jean Chretien, was in a hospital bed in Hong Kong being treated for a kidney stone.

Uh... let me rephrase, revise, rejig that.

I don't wish our former prime minister ill. Far from it.

What I meant to say is that I was delighted to discover that Chretien, who is 85, had traveled to Hong Kong, as he has done frequently since his retirement from politics in 2003. On this occasion he was to be the featured speaker at an important U.S.-China Trade and Economic Relations Forum. The fact Chretien ended up with a painful kidney stone, which forced him to cancel his speech and have the stone removed in a hospital far from home, was, well, coincidental and unrelated to my joy at the reality that Chretien is still traveling, still working, still actively engaged, still living a productive life—and this is my real point—at 85 years of age.

For reasons not unrelated to my own not-quite-so advancing years, I have begun to note such hopeful harbingers.

I couldn't help but notice, for example, that two of the leading candidates for the U.S. Democratic party's presidential nomination are both in their seventies. Joe Biden is 76 (interestingly, “age” was the first supplementary search term that popped up when I typed his name into Google). Bernie Sanders is 77. The man they want to replace, Donald Trump, is 73. The woman who still dominates and runs the American House of Representatives, Nancy Pelosi, is 79.

I offer this as an endorsement for none of the above—Lord, save the world from most of that lot, whatever their age—but merely an observation as I age and become more age-centric, observations I now feel entitled to offer unbidden... thanks to my age.

I came of middle age assuming I would have no choice but to retire from my fulltime job when I crossed the official over-the-hill threshold at 65, which was when, under Canadian law, your employer could terminate you for no better reason than the fact you were now 65.

For many, of course, that was—is—a blessing. Mandatory retirement is a privilege our parents fought for and won: the well-earned luxury of escaping after too many decades of the relentless, unforgiving nine-to-five.

But I loved my job and could not imagine a time when I wouldn't.

Luckily for me (if not the world, and certainly not for a younger generation wanting the job I didn't want to let go of) Ottawa eliminated mandatory retirement on December 31, 2009, five years before I was to hit the magic 6-5.

When I got to choose, I chose to stay. Even though I have since chosen to turn my fulltime position into half-time, I'm still working five years on, still having fun and still, I hope, being useful.

Which brings me to my larger point. Which is... Geezer Power.

While it is certainly not a long-term solution to our region's demographic woes—immigration and in-migration will be—the fact is that, at 20 per cent of our entire population of men, women and children, we currently have the highest proportion of persons 65 and over in all of Canada. And that percentage is likely to increase even more over the next decade.

Let's turn what the world views as a negative into a positive.

Our governments should certainly be working diligently to attract new immigrants and bring back those Atlantic Canadians who've previously decamped to more welcoming jurisdictions, it's past time governments and businesses also began tapping in to what is an existing resource: geezers whose get-up-and-go hasn't got-up-and-gone.

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FEEDBACK

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