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Youth can lead the way in upcoming elections

Michele Deakin, Oceanside Star

Published: Monday, September 08, 2008

Bad officials are elected by good citizens who do not vote.

~ Andrew Lack

Participating in elections and planning consultations is certainly not up there on the average person's list of favorite entertainment. I know they are not on mine. And though politics can be interesting, voter turnout in Canada has declined over the past eight years, with only 38% of eligible youth casting ballots in 2004.

We need to change that situation this coming year. Over the next 6-8 months we will have elections at all levels of government. This is a lot for anyone to consider.

The media in Canada are already starting to buzz about the elections. They are debating whether the high media interest in the U.S.

election will take the focus off Canada's national election, not to mention the others we are facing..

People are already advancing the issues they feel need to be discussed in the upcoming elections: the economy, the environment, health, education, child care and climate change, with sustainability somewhere on the periphery.

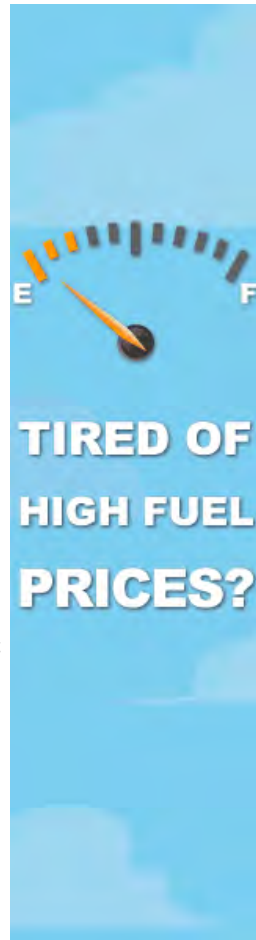
The election's 'silly season' is expected to take off for 7-10 weeks now and then again in the spring for the provincial election – and we will be in the middle of it all. As frustrating as it is to make sense of where the candidates stand on issues, our choices will determine whether our nation will remain one of the more desired countries to live. These are interesting times, and it will be important, and maybe even fun, for all of us, regardless of age, to consider what we might create through our votes.

With so many changes possible at so many levels, we have a chance to create a vision of a different Canada, our province, and community. By telling our potential leaders what we want to vote for, we can encourage them to take on those positions that best reflect what we truly want. But it's best we tell them before the election, not after.

A recent poll reviewed support for Stephane Dion's carbon tax. It indicated that there is a definite split on how people would vote depending on age. Those 18-34 years old generally support the tax, the middle-aged are somewhat divided, and older voter support for the tax has hit a new low.

Is this difference due to the vested interest that the younger generation has in the future, so much so that they are willing to pay the price to have one? Perhaps many don't have mortgages to pay and families to support, but some do. And anyone who supports a tax knows their income will be affected and they'll have to give up something in their lifestyle, such as travel or purchases, in exchange.

Our youth and young adults are growing up in a very different world. I learned about environmental issues fairly young but I never thought I'd see the day when we were concerned about a lack of clean water and clean air, or oceans that work. My parents lived through a depression and world war, but didn't really believe they'd run out of water or fuel. None of us considered the possibility of climate change. This younger generation has all of these concerns and more, and is looking to make some real changes.



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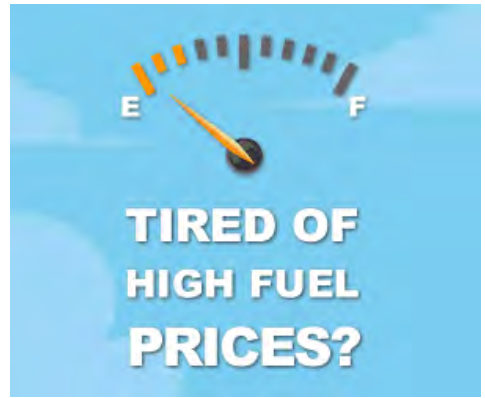
Regular stories in the media talk about young families looking for smaller, ecologically friendly homes; people are choosing to live close to work and eat local foods to reduce their footprint. Contrast that with a recent article that showed the globally wealthiest 8% are responsible for most of humanity's fossil fuel use, and most of that use is spent on non-essentials.

Faith Popcorn, well-known trend predictor, has pointed out that purchasing less and living more simply is and will become even more common over the next few years. Conversations with various young people show that status symbols are changing to alternative energies, smaller vehicles and Vespas, leaving huge homes and Hummers behind.

As a generation, perhaps youth are now leading the way. But we can't sit back. It has been the creation and promotion of our lifestyle that has resulted in a lot of the issues the upcoming elections need to address. We have borrowed from their future and shouldn't just leave it to the next generation to solve our problems.

An engaged and energized youth vote could sway elections at all levels. Let's follow their lead and consider what kind of future we want for our children, their children, and ourselves. Let's demand it of our governments – municipal, regional, provincial and federal. If we do it soon enough, we can shape the platforms already being developed.

Demanding policies and actions that lead to a sustainable future instead of the usual platforms will make silly season seem a little less so.



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