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Which federal party is best for the environment?


Roy Ostling, Oceanside Star

Published: Monday, September 15, 2008

With the countdown to the Oct. 14 federal election underway, media pundits are busy analyzing the polls and assessing the likely winners and losers. One recent voter survey ranks the environment second only to the economy as the most important election issue. But which party has the best policies on sustainability and is most likely to improve our country's environmental performance that currently ranks 12th in the world?

All four national parties promote policies to tackle climate change, reduce greenhouse gas emissions and create a greener economy. Yet none of the three mainstream parties address the demand for an ever-growing economy that is out of balance with our environment's ability to replace the resources we use or absorb the wastes we produce.

Only the Green Party of Canada has adopted a principle recognizing "the scope for material expansion of society within the biosphere and the need to maintain biodiversity through the use of renewable resources."

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Bloc leader Gilles Duceppe, whose party is limited to the province of Quebec, got the root of the matter when he said "there's no possible future for the economy, if it's not linked to the environment."

Liberal leader Stephane Dion is perceived as most capable of handling environment issues. He's staked his political future and his party's on the Green Shift carbon tax plan, which would

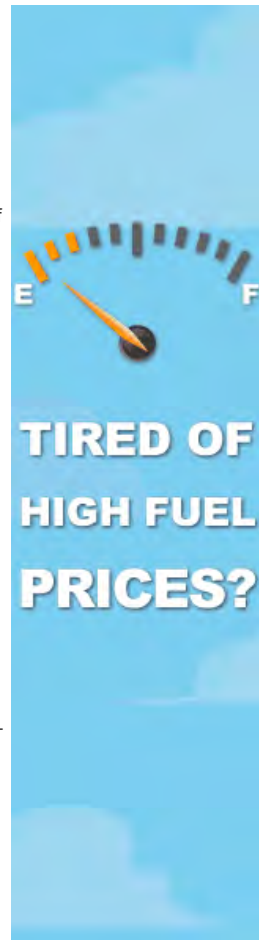
shift taxes from income to polluters. The Green Shift includes a detailed analysis of costs and would gradually increase federal taxes on all fossil fuels except for gasoline. The approach is revenue-neutral and claims to increase energy efficiency, while reducing poverty.

The Liberal's have stated that one of the greatest challenges of the 21st century is the need to reconcile economic growth and environmental sustainability. They also recognize that market forces alone aren't sufficient to solve the problems of our deteriorating ecosystems. But at the same time they tell us we can continue to grow our material economy and have a healthy environment.

The Conservatives have attacked the Green Shift plan calling it too risky for the country and that it will hobble Canada's fossil-fuel based economy. Their plan claims it will cut our greenhouse gas emissions by 20% by 2020 and air pollution in half by 2015. Their CO2 emissions targets, however, are intensity-based – which is simply a ratio between GDP and carbon emissions – and could still allow greenhouse gases to rise as GDP increases.

An 80% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 is part of the NDP's "five-point Green Agenda for Canada", and would be achieved through a cap and trade system. Party leader Jack Layton has also said that he would halt new oil tar sands development until control of emissions is achieved.

The Green Party has its own Green Tax Shift plan, which is similar to that of the Liberal's approach. What differentiates the Green Party's vision is its understanding of "the scientifically verified limits to growth set by the carrying capacity of our planet" and the need to work within these limits.



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At least this time around, all parties will be included in the leaders debates to held Oct. 1-2. We'll be able to assess their potentials and, in particular, see how all the leaders, including Green Party leader Elizabeth May, defend their environmental platforms.

The four federal candidates running in our Nanaimo-Alberni riding have yet to offer much in the way of their individual positions on environment issues. John Fryer of the Green Party, Zeni Maartman of the NDP, and Richard Pesik of the Liberals are challenging incumbent Conservative MP James Lunney, who has represented the riding since 2000.

Lunney, who says the environment is an issue this time around, has done little but criticize the Liberal's Green Shift tax, so we'll have to see if he has anything constructive to say in upcoming local all-candidates forums.

To research which party offers the best policies and platform to address our country's environment issues and move towards economic and environmental sustainability, check out their websites at www.conservative.ca, www.greenparty.ca, www.liberal.ca, and www.ndp.ca. Watch for news about local all-candidate debates and take the time to see where they stand.

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You can comment on this column at www.qualicuminstitute.ca/wpress or contact Roy directly at rostling@qualicuminstitute.ca

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