

IT'S TIME FOR ACTION
ON
THE ENVIRONMENT
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We Liberals are about to choose a new Leader. Our choice will depend, to some extent, on the respective candidates' views in a variety of policy areas. And anyone who knows me knows that I am not shy about my opinions and about engaging in vigorous policy debate.

However, the future of the Party must not depend on, or be dictated by, one person. True leadership includes the ability to listen to others, and to assimilate various perspectives—it's not just the ability to persuade others of one's own views. It is the job of all Liberals across Canada to participate in development of party policy, and I feel very strongly about implementing new and more effective processes for engaging grass roots liberals in real, healthy and constructive policy debate.

It is time for a new "Red Book", a compilation of policies to take the Liberal Party, and Canada, successfully and proudly, well into the 21st century. That Red Book will take a lot of work, and will require the input of Liberals across the country. That process must be constructive, effective and inclusive.

But once we have done so, the next key element of leadership comes into play: the ability, based on the collective views of the whole, to then *get things done*.

In the meantime, as part of that process and as we work toward choosing our next Leader, I will offer some policy suggestions of my own. To that end, I will be issuing policy suggestions in a variety of areas over the next weeks. Let's engage in some open, honest, and vigorous policy discussion among all Liberals.

IT'S TIME FOR ACTION ON THE ENVIRONMENT

The following are some environmental policy suggestions. The environment and the challenges posed by climate change and pollution are extremely complex, and global in nature. There are no quick-fixes and no easy answers. Most certainly, the following can only be summary in nature. But the challenges are very serious, and action is needed right away---sometimes tough action, sometimes expensive action. However, the consequences of not acting now will only be tougher and more expensive.

Climate Change and Kyoto

Climate change is happening, and it's happening quickly. The science is clear on that now. The major culprit is the very large increases in the amount of greenhouse gases (GHG) emitted into the atmosphere over the last 50 plus years, directly tied to huge increases in human activity around the globe. Climate change is also a global challenge—environmental issues do not pay attention to political borders; global warming does not stop at Customs and Immigration. As a global challenge, this requires global, multilateral solutions, which is why ***Canada must remain committed to the Kyoto protocol***. We must also be realistic---we have not yet done nearly enough to fulfill our commitments, and each year of continued inaction means that our targets will be even harder to reach. The views and inaction of the current Conservative government are

extremely worrisome. But does this mean we give up? Of course not. It means we simply have more to do.

Pollution – Air, Water and Soil

But there is much more to the environment, and the related challenges we face, than climate change. In all the discussion about climate change and global warming, we seem to have forgotten pollution---air pollution, water pollution, soil pollution. It's getting much worse, too. Anyone who lives in any of the larger cities can see and breathe the dirty air---particularly in summer. And, as only one example, the relationship between air pollution and health is immediate---every additional car on our commuter routes means more puffers being issued by doctors to kids with asthma; means more challenges for the elderly with breathing problems; in many cases means premature deaths. Water pollution requires water treatment plants for communities that not long ago could simply drink and use the water from the local lake and river systems. The costs of dealing with the health effects of environmental degradation are huge---so the economic rationale for investing in preventing further degradation and in cleaning existing pollution is clear.

Action

We must continue toward achieving our Kyoto targets of reducing GHG emissions, we must reduce and change those activities that cause air and water pollution and we must do more to clean up what we've already polluted. ***But how?***

Government of Canada's 2005 "Climate Change Plan"

As far as Kyoto targets are concerned, we do not need major new policy---indeed, Project Green, the Government of Canada's 2005 "Climate Change Plan" is an excellent start. It includes specific recommendations for progress with Large Final Emitters (LFEs), and initiatives for encouraging development of renewable energy sources such as wind power. But it had only been developed (Kyoto only became law in February, 2005) in 2005, just in time for our whole commitment to Kyoto to be dismissed by the current Conservative government. We must get back on track with the Climate Change Plan, and turn those plans into action---in the meantime, we must continue to pressure the Conservative government on its clear lack of support for these environmental initiatives.

But the Climate Change Plan is not enough. There is a lot more that we can do. This piece will focus on two areas where we can, and should, take concrete action.

Public Transit

It used to be that a big car was a sign of affluence. Now, a better sign of affluence is a country that invests in good, sustainable public transit. We are an affluent country, and it's time to put that affluence to good use.

We must invest far more in public transit infrastructure. Encouraging more use does no good when the system itself is limited and overburdened. Toronto's subway system was state of the art, _____ years ago. It has been surpassed by so many other world cities and is widely recognized as sorely inadequate. The GTA is desperately in need of much enhanced subway and

other rapid transit systems. Montreal as well; Vancouver and other urban centres. Yes, the costs are enormous, but the costs of not making these critical investments, in terms of air pollution, health, congestion and the corresponding consequences for economic development are all far too high. Any investment must generate a return---whether that return is economic or societal. Significant investment in public transit will generate both economic and societal benefits, in terms of less congestion and cost savings in health promotion and prevention of illness.

But that's not enough. There is so much ***more*** that we can do.

As but one example: with new net metering and smart metering opportunities, we could encourage residential households to embrace photovoltaic power, not as a replacement, but as a great back up that can, now, be economically feasible with a decent pay-back period. I may be biased---I have been a solar power user now for almost a decade, and my system has far more than paid for itself. But I'm just one person---if we can encourage many, it could reap huge conservation dividends. But that encouragement will cost money, through subsidy initiatives, creative taxation. We know that Canadians respond if their wallets are affected, so that's where we need to focus.