



FEDERAL ELECTION 2008: QUESTIONS FOR CANDIDATES

Every day of this election Council members, chapter activists and supporters will be asking candidates questions on doorsteps, at all-candidates debates, and on local radio call-in programs.

The election provides a great opportunity to get future Members of Parliament on record about important issues. By asking questions, you can help press candidates to make real promises. Keep a record of what candidates have to say on the campaign trail so we can hold politicians to their promises after the election.

ENERGY

Would you support a Canadian energy strategy that provides reliable supplies of oil, gas and electricity at stable prices and protects the environment, even if this means placing restrictions on exports and foreign ownership of Canadian supplies?

89% of Canadians agree that Canada should establish such an energy policy, based on a survey commissioned by the Council of Canadians. Right now, our country does not have a national energy strategy that addresses where our energy comes from, where it is going and the environmental devastation that comes with producing it. Governments have signed away control of our energy resources under the free-market, energy integration agenda through multilateral agreements such as NAFTA and the Security and Prosperity Partnership of North America (SPP). Thanks to NAFTA, Canada now exports 70 per cent of the oil and 61 per cent of the natural gas we produce each year to the U.S. while importing close to 49 per cent of Canada's oil needs. NAFTA prevents us from selling our energy resources at rates lower than we sell them in the U.S. and cutting back on the proportion of energy we produce and sell to the U.S. – even in times of need or to meet conservation goals.

Would you press the federal government to pursue a policy of multi-year energy reserves for use by Canadians in hard times and to assist in the transition to greener energy alternatives?

For over 15 years, Canada has lived with free trade agreements and free market rules that are used to ensure that our energy resources keep flowing out of the country with little or no direction from government. Faced with diminishing conventional resources globally and climate change, now more than ever, we need a Canadian energy strategy. This strategy must protect the environment, provide security of energy production, distribution and supply and plan for a transition to less harmful energy alternatives. This should include a plan for multi-year energy reserves that can be used by Canadians in times of need and to assist in the necessary transition away from fossil fuels. Before exporting oil and gas, our governments should ensure that 10 to 15 years of oil and gas supplies are reserved. In order to accomplish this, an energy exemption should be negotiated in NAFTA and the continental resource pact as proposed under the Security and Prosperity Partnership (SPP) should be rejected.

Would you support a ban on uranium exploration and mining?

Uranium mining is environmentally and socially destructive. The effects of uranium exploration and mining threaten to contaminate surrounding environment and water sources. Reputable scientists have linked uranium exploration and mining to rises in cancer and other diseases in neighbouring communities. Across the country people are challenging explorations for new uranium mines, many of which are on or near First Nations land.

Would you support a position of no new approvals on tar sands developments?

The Council of Canadian's supports the call for no new approvals in the tar sands as a first step to addressing the environmental and social impacts of uncontrolled tar sands development. Some of the well-known effects of oil and gas production include: the devastation to the boreal forest; the vast amounts of water required for the mining process; the fact that the tar sands are the fastest growing source of greenhouse gas emissions in Canada; the use of relatively clean burning natural gas to extract heavy crude; the lack of infrastructure and public services in affected communities; and the impact on aboriginal communities and their land claims.

WATER

“Would your party support a comprehensive national water policy that bans the bulk export of fresh water?”

According to a 2008 Environics Research poll, [88% of Canadians agree that Canada should adopt such a policy](#). Our government, however, continues to leave water on the trading block; both through NAFTA, and through ongoing, closed-door, deep integration initiatives between Canada, the U.S., and Mexico.

“Would your party support a comprehensive national water policy that recognizes clean drinking water as a basic human right?”

According to a the same 2008 Environics Research poll, [88% of Canadians also agree that Canada's national water policy should recognize clean drinking water as a basic human right](#). In the spring of this year, our government single-handedly blocked a U.N. resolution to recognize water as a human right.

“Do you support strengthening the Fisheries Act to protect our freshwater lakes from being destroyed by toxic mine waste?”

Lakes that would normally be protected as fish habitat by the Fisheries Act are now being redefined as “tailing impoundment areas” according to a 2002 “schedule” added to the Metal Mining Effluent Regulations of the Act. Once added to Schedule 2, healthy fresh water lakes lose all protection and become dump sites for mining waste. In 2006, two lakes in Newfoundland were added to Schedule 2 and more recently two lakes in Nunavut were approved for destruction.

TRADE

“Would your party withdraw from the SPP discussions and commit to meaningful consultation with civil society for all future North American and international trade agreements?”

[87% of Canadians agree that Canada should maintain the ability to set its own independent environmental, health and safety standards](#), even if this might reduce cross-border trade opportunities with the United States. And yet the government is committed to an SPP policy of regulatory harmonization in the areas of consumer product safety, food and drugs, and the environment.

Furthermore, [86% of Canadians agree that the Security and Prosperity Partnership agreement should be debated and submitted to a vote in Parliament](#). Yet four years later, the debate is nowhere to be seen.

“Will your party call for the renegotiation of NAFTA, specifically with aim of removing the proportionality clause?”

For years, we have been told that globalization and free trade are inevitable, and that the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) would bring jobs and prosperity to Canadians. But in the aftermath of the softwood lumber decision, even former supporters of free trade are arguing that NAFTA isn't working for Canada. Some have called for forceful retaliation against the U.S., while others have suggested that we should get out of NAFTA – before it's too late.

The bottom line is: NAFTA is a bad deal for Canada. It undermines democracy, strips Canada of control over our energy resources, threatens to put [water](#) up for sale, and endangers [health care](#) and other public services. We want a trade system that protects our social safety net, jobs and natural resources.

HEALTH CARE

“Will you support a ban on all for-profit clinics?”

Private clinics typically charge 10 to 15 per cent more than the public sector for procedures in order to fund administration costs and shareholder profits. At the same time, these clinics draw doctors and other health care professionals away from the public system, which already faces shortages. The result? Longer wait times in the public system for those who can't afford to pay high enrolment and annual fees, or inflated surgical costs.

“What will your party do to enforce the Canada Health Act?”

Prime Minister Stephen Harper pledged to enforce the Canada Health Act during the 2006 federal election, but has now spoken out in favour of for-profit health care delivery.

Provinces continue to contribute to the dismantling of medicare by allowing for-profit private clinics and services that let people who have money pay for health care. The latest report to Parliament on the status of the Canada Health Act says that the provinces are committing serious breeches to the five principles of medicare by allowing direct charges to patients, queue-jumping and the establishment of private clinics.

In fact, there were even provinces that did not submit information as required by law for the preparation of the report to Parliament. A recent article in *The Globe and Mail* revealed that only one province, British Columbia, was fined last year for violating Canada's Health Act after private surgical clinics there charged user fees to patients.

PEACE

“If your party is elected, when will Canadian troops leave Afghanistan?”

The threat assessment maps produced by the United Nations demonstrate a steadily deteriorating situation from May 2005 (with no districts in Afghanistan identified as “extreme risk”) to December 2007 (with 14 of the 17 districts in Kandahar marked as “extreme risk”). The *Globe and Mail* reported on March 1 that “Last year, more than 6,500 people, most of them ordinary Afghans, were killed in violence, as compared with roughly 4,000 in 2006, and 1,000 in 2005.”

The so-called 'Independent Panel on Canada's Future Role in Afghanistan' headed by John Manley acknowledged that, “By many knowledgeable accounts, security generally has deteriorated in the South and East of Afghanistan, including the Kandahar province where Canadian Forces are based, through 2006 and 2007.”

An Angus Reid Strategies poll released on December 31, 2007 shows that 61 percent of Canadians oppose an extension of the military mission beyond the current deadline of February 2009. 53 percent of Canadians want Canadian soldiers to come home before that date.

“Would you grant refuge to all U.S. war resisters?”

On June 27, it was reported that, “A majority of Canadians would agree with the decision to let American military deserters stay in Canada as permanent residents, a new Angus Reid Strategies survey reveals. In the online survey of a representative national sample, three-in-five Canadians (64%) say they would agree to give these U.S. soldiers the opportunity to remain in Canada as permanent residents.”