



A better future,
together
Ensemble pour
un avenir meilleur

Better lives for Canada's education
community retirees
Une vie meilleure pour les retraités du
secteur de l'éducation au Canada

RTOERO

Federal election op-ed – environment

Environment isn't an election issue – it's about our survival

Election cycles are short, and the issue-of-the-day can hit at immediate concerns. The handling of the COVID-19 pandemic, health care, jobs and the cost of living are all, understandably, top of mind. Yet a sustainable future, for Canadians and our planet, depends on environmental stewardship. That's what will ensure our long term well-being.

Climate change, air quality, water quality, bio-diversity loss and pollution can be intimidating concepts. And the news can be disheartening.

This July was the hottest month in recorded history. Here in Canada, wildfires have been worse than ever, and the connection to climate change is clear. And in August, the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change said it's "unequivocal" that human activity is driving climate change, and is affecting the Earth – our oceans, atmosphere, ice and biosphere – in a manner that's "widespread and rapid".

While the harm is daunting, progress is possible. That's why the environment is one of the core advocacy issues for RTOERO. We're a trusted voice for healthy, active living in retirement. Our 81,000-plus members believe in the power of our community to secure a better future, and understand that the health of our environment is paramount to that.

The response to the pandemic shows that we can drive massive change with the right leadership. During this federal election campaign we want to focus on four environmental areas where we can make a difference.

One, environmentally-sustainable transportation.

Transportation accounts for about one-quarter of Canada's carbon emissions. As our population and economy grows, so do the number of vehicles on our roads. Progressive government policies can drive more sustainable transportation, i.e. electric vehicles, cleaner public transport, clean fuel standards, biking, etc.

Two, plastics.

In 2020, the federal government announced a ban of six single-use plastic items (grocery bags, straws, stir sticks, cutlery, six-pack rings and food containers made from hard-to-recycle plastics), to be phased out by 2022. Still, the ban leaves out a huge

chunk of plastics we actually use everyday. We need a government approach to manage the entire life cycle of plastics.

Three, common recycling standards.

With all the recycling efforts made by municipalities and companies, there's much room to improve. For instance, Deloitte reports that just 9% of the plastic waste generated annually in Canada is recycled. One hurdle to greater progress: the lack of a harmonized approach across jurisdictions.

Government policies or incentives can help us move from a linear economy (ongoing consumption of resources) to a circular one (reusing resources). Other steps can help us to increase the recycling rate, and lower contamination rates, i.e. non-recyclable material in the recycling system.

Four, safe water supply.

Our freshwater resources are a national treasure. The Great Lakes, for instance, holds over 20% of the entire world's surface freshwater. Pollution and misuse threatens that. Meanwhile, while urban centres enjoy access to clean water, several First Nations communities across Canada often face drinking water advisories.

Legislation and changes in business practices both have a role in protecting our freshwater sources. We also need to upgrade water systems and alleviate the drinking water crisis in First Nations communities right now.

A sustainable future depends on responsible use of resources, conservation and protecting our air, land and water. Individuals, companies and industry groups all have a part to play in environmental stewardship, and so does government.

We need to hold government accountable to maintain the viability of our ecosystems for ourselves, our children and our grandchildren.