

## LIBERAL BIENNIAL CONVENTION 2012 POLICY SESSION REPORT

**Name of session:** Environment

**List of all participants (including moderator, panellists, Caucus reps, NPEP representative and rapporteur):**

Moderator: Pablor Rodriguez

Caucus Rep: Kirsty Duncan

Pannelists: Steve Guilbeault, co-founder of Equiterre

Prof Gordon McBean, Univesity of Western Ontario

NPEP Rep: Wendy Butler

**Approximate number of delegates/observers in attendance:**

125-150

**Key points raised by panellists:**

Steven Guilbeault

- We should look at the examples of some of the recent studies done by banks like HSBC who have said 15% of future GDP growth in industrialized countries will be in the green economy. Among these countries, Canada is near the bottom. But developing countries are investing even more than industrialized countries with China leading the way.
- The Northern PipeLine will create a little over a hundred direct jobs once it has been completed. The green economy could lead to hundreds of thousands of jobs.
- Between 1990 and 2009 Quebec doubled its productivity while reducing its absolute greenhouse gas output. They use less water than 20 years ago as well. This was accomplished because Quebec business made their companies more efficient.
- An electric motor will convert 95% of energy into movement. But the federal government doesn't even have a program to help incentivise research and development in this area.

Prof. Gordon McBean

- We need to be able to know where we are going in order to tackle environmental challenges. We need to understand how our climate will change in the future. This knowledge is a public good and it is a fundamental role of government to inform its citizens of how climate may change.
- Economic opportunities will be denied to citizens who aren't able to access this ``public good``

- We are collectively paying for the damages caused by the changing climate. In Toronto, insurance companies are now paying \$600 million annually for flooded basements. We all pay for this with higher insurance rates.
- The money that universities received in Budget 2003 to study climate change has now lapsed and is not likely to be renewed under the current government.

#### **Key points raised by Caucus rep:**

- Eco systems are the foundations of human life and livelihoods. We have been altering them rapidly at our peril.
- The Rio+20 conference in June will be one of the most important meetings in history. I will tackle green energy, food sustainability, water resources and climate change.
- Sustainable development will need governments, industries and civil society working together.
- Taking action to reduce greenhouse gasses right now could cost around 1% of GDP. Not taking action will cost much more.

#### **Key points raised by NPEP rep on member feedback and online resolutions:**

- Policies have been debated on oil sands, moratorium on shale gas, moratorium on tanker traffic, the effects of climate change in the North.
- Liberals are smart on energy. We need to offer smart environmental solutions.
- Government's need to collect real data to measure both the consequences of climate change and our attempts to mitigate it.
- The creation of a Canadian power grid.
- Providing grants to small and medium sized projects that deliver renewable energy
- Water is not a commodity but an essential resource that requires the government to take a direct leadership role. We need to modernize the Canada Water Act.

#### **Highlights of Q and A session:**

- Fighting climate change has a lot to do with hope, but technology is based on science and data, how do we reconcile that?
  - McBean: Scientists around the globe are providing their advice on how to deal with climate change to the Rio +20 conference and it is not based on hope but solid science.
- The Vancouver Board of Trade has a sustainability group. One of our concerns is when an event will occur due to climate change (flooding, volcanic etc...). Can we introduce an approach to our platform that takes into account the future costs of not tackling climate change?
  - McBean: My department is currently building a model to examine the economic impact of rising sea levels in BC.
  - Guilbeault: Cites some examples of studies that have been done including adaptation strategies.

- How do we deal with climate change skeptics and bring them onside?
  - McBean: We can't convert them. Their process is not to listen.
  - Guilbeault: We should focus on those people who aren't quite sure. Expose them to the science and the data.
- Human life depends on how mankind can alter eco systems successfully. If we don't move towards nuclear power we can't have a sustainable eco system.
  - Guilbeault: Disagrees with the premise. Nuclear power is very expensive and dangerous, look at Japan. We have better technologies today that work, all around the world, that we can use right here in Canada.
- Does the Liberal Party have the guts to support a Canadian auto industry by making super efficient cars? Our support for the Challenger program helped launch our aerospace industry. Perhaps investment in the cars of the future could move auto production here.
  - The Quebec government wants 20% of vehicle to be electric or electric hybrid by 2020. We are moving in this direction in that province and more could be done.
- Some people in the debate between highways and light rail say that since we are close to using water as a fuel we should be building highways instead. Is there anything like that actually on the horizon?
  - Guilbeault: Even if we succeed in developing a very efficient vehicle, we still need to turn to mass transportation as it takes far less energy and less investment in infrastructure.
- We're not talking about the machinery of government. Environment cuts across everything and by having a separate department, environmental issues are not folded into each department's decision making process. Would the Liberal Party do something bold and do something like scrap the development agencies and introduce Environmentally oriented substitute agencies for developing the green economy?
  - Duncan: We're hear today to listen and ideas like these are important
- On the West coast we have the very serious potential of an earthquake/tsunami and need ground forces West of the Rockies to deal with it. We used to be world leaders on the environment. How do we get back there?
  - Duncan: I agree with you. We need to take a leadership role at Rio rather than an obstructionist role like we did in Durban. I will be crossing the country to bring attention to this.
- What is the Liberal Party's reduction target for 2050? What should the target be and why?
  - Duncan: The government first needs to accept the science of climate change. I believe we have probably missed the opportunity to keep climate change to a 2 degree increase. We are probably looking at 3 degrees.
  - Guilbeault. We should be aiming at minus 60 to 80%.
  - McBain: I agree with what Steven said.
- When we make a decision today our decisions are based on cost inputs and expected revenue. Are their models that are currently identifying the costs people are bearing due to climate change?

- Guilbeault: There are lots of models that include those types of estimates in their lifecycle costs for a project. They even include what happens to the materials once a projects life cycle is over such as recycling.
- When I started in the oil industry in 1981 the oil companies were building the infrastructure based on hope. It was largely built on federal and provincial money. This can be done with sustainable energy sources. The government can pick winners, but we are picking oil as the winner.
- Where, from a constitutional point of view, does the environment fall?
  - It's a shared responsibility. And it is very complicated. Although it's rapidly becoming a provincial matter in the absence of federal leadership.
- Today in Churchill there is barely any ice. It is destroying the way of life of local communities.
- Does the Liberal Party have the courage to keep speaking the truth about climate change despite the fact that the electorate doesn't seem to want to listen.
- Considering that most of Europe uses a carbon tax, along with many developing countries, and their economies have not been crushed, doesn't it merit implementing one here?
  - McBean: Almost every leading economist who deals with climate change agrees it is the most efficient and effective way to deal with it.
- All of the nuclear reactors we have today use uranium because the waste is used for weapons. There are new methods that are much safer and can't be weaponized. We should use those.
- We failed to reduce our emissions after signing Kyoto. What are we going to do in the future to ensure we keep our promises?
  - Duncan: We built budget 2005's Project Green, which Pembina says would have got us 80% of the way to our targets. This was gutted when the Conservatives came to power. We need to actually implement solutions like Project Green.
- I am discouraged that the Liberals see climate change as an environment issue. It is a global security issue. Liberals need to add environmentally sustainable to the mantra of "Fiscally responsible and socially progressiv"