

Questions to Candidates for Manitoba Provincial Environment Forum

September 14, 2011

1) Wetlands

Climatologists have predicted that global warming will bring more severe weather events such as heavy rains and flooding to the prairies in the spring, and hot dry summers. Chances are that the kind of weather we have had in this province this year will occur more frequently. Wetlands are crucial to managing floods and water protection.

What steps would your government take to preserve and restore wetlands? Would you consider measures like bans on drainage and paying farmers to restore wetlands on their property?

2) Greenhouse gases

What would your government's target for greenhouse gas reductions in Manitoba be for the next decade, and how would you achieve these reductions?

3) Bipole III

There are four major parties, and each has a different stand on the issue of Bipole III. It is often posed as a question of money versus the environment, but in fact environmental arguments can be made for all sides. Please explain what you regard as the most significant environmental concerns, why you think your party's position best meets these concerns and, if you would authorize the Clean Environment Commission to hear evidence and make recommendations on the comparative environmental impacts of the various alternatives that have been proposed for Bipole III?

4) Waste in Manitoba

According to figures from Statistics Canada, reporting for the year 2008, Manitoba ranked 8th out of 9 provinces (for which numbers were available) in the area of solid waste that was landfilled or diverted. Only Saskatchewan had a worse record for solid waste diversion.

What would a provincial government led by your party do to reduce waste in Manitoba and to increase the proportion of waste that is diverted from landfill?

5) Transition to carbon-free transportation

Global warming is happening, and further increases are inevitable, but to prevent catastrophic warming, we will have to cut emissions drastically. In Manitoba roughly a third of our emissions come from transportation. Global warming and the end of cheap oil mean that we will have to move quickly to reduce our dependence on fossil fuels and then shift entirely away from them to meet our transportation needs. We have to make significant progress toward that goal in by 2020.

What immediate steps would your party in government take to bring about that transition? What further steps would you take in the next decade?

6) Pipelines

Recent protests in Washington DC over the Keystone XL pipeline, and a number of very damaging recent spills, have raised awareness of the threats posed by oil pipeline spills. Hundreds of kilometres of oil pipelines pass through Manitoba, many over sensitive eco-systems and important groundwater sources. Their capacity is increasing. How will your government monitor oil pipelines, and how will you ensure Manitobans and our environment are safeguarded from possible spills?

7) GE alfalfa

If genetically engineered alfalfa is introduced in Canada, intermixing of conventional, organic and GE varieties could have serious deleterious effects for Manitoba's conventional and organic farmers, including livestock producers who use alfalfa for feed, and consumers. Canadian producers will lose foreign markets which exclude GE products. Would you lobby the federal minister of agriculture for a moratorium excluding the registration of genetically engineered alfalfa seeds from Manitoba?

8) Wildlife Management Areas

Manitoba celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of its Wildlife Management Area system this year. Over two million hectares are designated for the "conservation, management and enhancement of wildlife habitat and biodiversity...", but wildlife and ecosystems in these areas continue to face threats from firing ranges, All-Terrain Vehicle traffic and dumping of hazardous waste. What specifically will your government do to strengthen protection in Wildlife Management Areas?

9) Cosmetic pesticides

This summer, Newfoundland became the sixth Canadian province to enact a ban on the sale and use of cosmetic pesticides. British Columbia looks like it may be the seventh. Manitoba lags behind other jurisdictions in taking this clear step to protect humans and the environment from unnecessary chemical exposures caused by cosmetic pesticide use. If elected, will your party commit to enacting a ban on the sale and use of cosmetic pesticides in Manitoba?

10) Nuclear waste transportation

Manitoba has legislation prohibiting the deep geologic burial of high level nuclear waste in our province. However, communities in Saskatchewan are being vigorously courted as possible hosts for a repository for this country's ever growing stockpile of highly radioactive nuclear fuel waste. It is a very contentious issue in that province, but should a waste dump be developed in Saskatchewan, all of its contents will need to be transported by rail or road through Manitoba from reactors in the East. Daily radioactive shipments through farmland, small communities and watersheds will continue for years. If elected, will your party support a moratorium on the transportation of high level nuclear fuel waste through Manitoba?

11) Nutrient removal from waste water

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Reducing nutrient loading in Lake Winnipeg is identified as critical to protect the quality of Lake Winnipeg, but there is ongoing debate over the relative merits of removing nitrogen as well as phosphorous and ammonia. The Save Lake Winnipeg Act - passed by unanimous vote in the legislature, stipulates that Winnipeg's North End Pollution Control Centre be upgraded to a full state of the art biological nutrient removal facility, capable of eventually removing all nitrogen from waste water flowing through the plant. What is your party's position on the nutrient removal issue?

12) Biofuels

Manitoba implemented mandatory minimum quotas and subsidies for ethanol production in 2007 to address climate change and boost rural development. Since then, concerns have been raised that the use of ethanol as a biofuel can displace food supplies, increase the use of pesticides, fertilizers and genetically engineered crops, and on a full life-cycle basis, ethanol often has higher greenhouse gas emissions than conventional oil. What is your party's position on ethanol subsidization and quotas?

13) Flooding and land use planning

If elected, how will your party ensure sound land use planning both upstream and downstream that anticipates future flooding such as we have seen across western Manitoba this year?