

On the Doorsteps of CEPA

A disgruntled electorate at the doorstep, and the questions raised, may surprise politicians of any stripe or persuasion. Mismanagement, accountability, and a need for change will undoubtedly be top-of-mind vote issues for Canadians. What may be a shock to the party spin-doctors and prolific pollsters is the question we ask, "What about the CEPA?"

The CEPA is the *Canadian Environmental Protection Act*, described by our government as Canada's principal piece of environment legislation. The Act, a federal law, is supposed to protect the health and environment of Canadians through pollution prevention measures and the management of toxic substances that affect our lives. Our elected representatives in Parliament review the administration and effectiveness of this vital legislation every five years. The current CEPA review should have started in April 2005. Decisions on the CEPA and the subsequent protection of our air, waters, and lands are expected in 2006.

The CEPA is a complex law, however, its foundation is based on the moral principle that preventing pollution presents better governance rather than the public paying for pollution after it occurs. Unfortunately, as experienced by Canadians from coast to coast to coast, we are paying for pollution more often than not. This ongoing scandal includes our children who are paying for environmental mismanagement and the costs of preventable pollution through increasing rates of asthma, learning difficulties, and cancer. Nor should future generations be required to pay this unsustainable price for delay and inaction.

The CEPA is supposed to address a wide range of issues from controlling toxic substances to public participation in decision making, fuel standards, vehicle emissions, nutrients, biotechnology, hazardous waste, land-based sources of marine pollution, international air and water pollution, disposal at sea, governmental operations respecting federal and aboriginal lands, enforcement, environmental emergencies and other matters. Yet, the current CEPA realities in Canada are a demonstrated lack of political leadership through poor pollution prevention records and forgotten promises for environmental protection.

The next election will select a Parliament that decides whether Canada's environment and health are to be protected, or not. The people we elect will face intense corporate lobbying to protect the status quo, then decide through the CEPA who does what, where, when and how to prevent Canada's rising rates of pollution, illness and disease. They will determine whether the public good or competitive profiteering will be the government's first priority.

The past decade has seen both minimal progress on reducing pollution and its unhealthy side effects, and maximized profits at the expense of Canadians' health and our shared environment. Will the next Parliament meet the CEPA challenge?

In other countries, governments are achieving cleaner environments through timely and proactive measures that remove toxic substances from toys and consumer products, reduce the contaminants that affect air and water, and require action on dangerous chemicals discovered in umbilical cords and breast tissue. We should demand the same for Canada.

When the doorsteps ring with candidates electioneering on regurgitated scandals and many promises, where will they stand on the environment in 2006? “What about the CEPA?”

(505 Words)

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