

## **How did environment play in this election?**

by Aaron Freeman

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With the longest federal election campaign in modern history now behind us, and as federal officials heading to Paris for the UN Climate Meeting, the environmental community is hopeful that the new government will deliver the environmental leadership Canada urgently needs.

The election's unexpected Red Tide has meant the Liberals' platform is now under a microscope to determine just what was promised in terms of environmental action.

The platform touched on many environmental priorities, promising: a significant investment in green jobs, a national carbon price negotiated with the provinces, protections for national parks and waterways, and a modernization of Canada's environmental assessment process. The platform also laments Canada's loss of 71% of its clean tech market share over the previous decade, which it promises to start rebuilding.

While this has led many to be cautiously optimistic about a Liberal majority, UBC political scientist Kathryn Harrison notes that many of the Liberals' promises lacked specificity. For example: "It calls for a national price on carbon, but doesn't give any details about what that scheme would look like."

Harrison adds that the Conservative, NDP and Liberal platforms all "left the door open to one or more pipelines" that would facilitate increased development of the oil sands. While Trudeau has voiced objections to the Northern Gateway pipeline, like our previous government, he supported the construction of the recently rejected Keystone XL pipeline.

Ensuring that the new government's environmental promises are kept, and reversing the years of decline in Canada's environmental record will require leadership within all parties.

Historically, many of our federal environmental victories would never have occurred without this sort of cross-partisan leadership. Several toxic chemicals that are currently banned or restricted are the result of individual MPs passing private members' bills and working within their parties to convince their leaders to do the right thing. In other cases, like passing the Species At Risk Act and improving our main pollution law, the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act, MPs actually voted against their own party leadership.

In each of these examples, and many more, MPs worked with their colleagues across the aisle to make sure that Parliament did the right thing for Canadians and their environment.

If we are to turn Canada around on the environment, we will need this kind of courageous leadership in the new Parliament.

Earlier this year, together with other Canadians concerned about our country's environmental deficit, we launched GreenPAC, a non-partisan organization dedicated to building environmental leadership in Canadian politics.

This election was GreenPAC's inaugural campaign, and we endorsed 18 candidates from four major parties across the country. GreenPAC encouraged Canadians concerned about the environment to rally behind these candidates, and by supporting them, they helped elect 14 of these environmental champions.

Half of GreenPAC's winners were non-incumbents. Five out of six of the Liberal candidates won, six out of seven won from the NDP, and both Conservative candidates won, despite a massive decline in seats from the latter two parties.

In Winnipeg, GreenPAC endorsed Terry Duguid and Jim Carr, both of whom were elected. We were very pleased to see Jim Carr appointed as Minister of Natural Resources, and GreenPAC-endorsed MP Kirsty Duncan named as the new Minister of Science. Working with our highly qualified new Environment Minister Catherine McKenna and other new ministers, the cabinet has an impressive depth of expertise on environmental issues. We hope this guides decision-making and will translate into swift action to create the environmental policies we need.

For us, this is the most hopeful outcome of this election: 14 green champions, with some sitting at the Cabinet table, and the start of a conversation about building environmental leadership in Canadian politics.

With Prime Minister Trudeau inviting the premiers and opposition leaders to join the delegation to the UN climate summit in Paris this month, there's good reason to be optimistic that Canada may be poised for a renewed commitment on environmental action at the federal level. But it's very early days, and Canada has an immense task ahead.

It will take cross-partisan leadership to meet this challenge, and a politically relevant base of support for the environment across all major parties.

- *Aaron Freeman is the Founder and President of GreenPAC ([www.GreenPAC.ca](http://www.GreenPAC.ca)), Canada's non-partisan organization to build environmental leadership in politics.*