

Ontario Election 2011, October 6

Questions & *Answers*

In our Summer issue we called for our readers to send us questions to put to the provincial parties fielding candidates in the Oct. 6 election. We received thoughtful, complex questions that reveal your concerns and we chose five that we think cover a range of issues.

All the political parties, except for one, provided specific answers to these questions. The Ontario Progressive Conservative Party instead suggested the website changebook.ca.

Here are the questions from our readers, with the answers provided by the other parties. Parties were limited to the first 150 words in their answer to each question. Answers were not edited or altered. Answers have been printed in the order of representation in the current legislature, based on seats held.

1.

Which actions will your party take to increase environmental protection in the Niagara Escarpment area? Specifically, how would your party act to halt the encroachment of quarry mining onto prime arable and/or environmentally significant lands?

Rosemary and Roland Gosselin, Thornbury

ONTARIO LIBERAL PARTY

Ontario Liberals are the only party committed to protecting the natural environment in the Niagara Escarpment area where aggregate extraction is already prohibited in Natural Areas and Protection Areas.

In addition, in 2005, the Ontario Liberals strengthened the Niagara Escarpment Plan by introducing the *Greenbelt Act* to provide permanent protection of the agricultural land base and the ecological features and functions occurring within the Niagara Escarpment. The Greenbelt Plan also provides long-term guidance for the management of natural heritage and water resources when contemplating aggregate rehabilitation.

The PCs and NDP platforms barely touch on the environment or ecological protection and this year Bill Murdoch, one of Tim Hudak's PC MPPs, openly called for the scrapping of the Niagara Escarpment Commission.

The PCs have also promised to thoughtlessly pave a mega-highway through sensitive environmental lands in the escarpment.

The **ONTARIO PROGRESSIVE CONSERVATIVE PARTY** did not provide an answer to this question.

ONTARIO NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY

Our priority is to set out a clear vision for the Niagara Escarpment in a new Sustainable Growth Plan for the region. This will establish limits to urban areas, infrastructure priorities and protections for the area's natural and cultural heritage over the long-term. The aim is to provide a practical way forward that balances the need for economic growth with a sustainable approach to preserving the quality of life for all those with a stake in the future of the region.

The NDP believes the government must reject 'The Highland Companies' proposal to build a mega quarry in the Melancthon Township until a full provincial environmental assessment has been undertaken. If approved, the quarry will seriously compromise an environmentally sensitive area adjacent to the Niagara Escarpment.

GREEN PARTY OF ONTARIO

The Green Party of Ontario is committed to preserving farmland, farmers and natural heritage as an important part of creating a prosperous future for our children and grandchildren.

The Green Party of Ontario's "Five-Point Plan for Ontario's future" includes a priority commitment to an Ontario Food and Farming strategy, as preserving farmland begins with policies that support farmers. We will also protect municipally-identified agricultural, rural, and natural heritage sites such as the Niagara Escarpment.

The Green Party is greatly concerned about the expansion of quarries, especially their effect on our water quality, farmland and natural heritage. We are committed to revising the *Aggregate Resources Act* to encourage the reuse and recycling of aggregates. We support increasing royalty fees for aggregate extraction to fund stewardship programs, and are committed to working with industry and organizations on developing and supporting Socially and Environmentally Responsible Aggregate (SERA) standards in Ontario.

2.

In 2008 the Sorbara study "Discovering Ontario" was initiated, was released in 2009 and in 2010 the proposed Regional Tourism Organizations began their transition phase. What can we expect from your party, should you gain a win, in regards to this initiative?

Peter Majewsky, Markdale

ONTARIO LIBERAL PARTY

Ontario Liberals have implemented 13 new industry-led Regional Tourism Organizations (RTO's). In the past, tourism organizations worked independently, often with limited resources. Now tourism partners are benefiting from a coordinated and collaborative approach that maximizes resources, encourages more strategic planning and investment, and results in stronger marketing with better reach. Ontario Liberals will continue to support the transition of the RTOs with an investment of over \$188 million from 2010-2013 and \$40 million in on-going, annual funding thereafter. This is the right step in our plan to attract tourism and build a stronger economy.

The PCs will be forced to make deep cuts to fill their \$14 billion platform hole. Given their voting record and hostility toward the escarpment, their cuts to these regional initiatives would be swift and deep.

The NDP appears determined to raise taxes on the job creators that our regional tourism initiative focuses on.

The **ONTARIO PROGRESSIVE CONSERVATIVE PARTY** did not provide an answer to this question.

ONTARIO NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY

The NDP fully supports the Regional Tourism Organizations. We are glad there is finally action on this much needed initiative. We will be carefully monitoring the roll-out and development of these organizations to ensure they achieve the objectives set for them and offer value for money.

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GREEN PARTY OF ONTARIO

Tourism is an essential part of Ontario's economy, creating economic benefits and showcasing our province's natural and cultural heritage.

Green MPPs will promote expansion of community events and tourism in ways that preserve and celebrate our natural heritage, promote local food and farming and provide our kids opportunities in our local communities.

The Green Party's economic plan offers support for small and medium businesses that power Ontario's tourism industry, by lowering taxes and offering incentives and rewards to help businesses become more energy efficient.

We are strong supporters of culinary and agri-tourism. As part of our Ontario food and farming strategy, we will work with municipalities and farm organizations to open new farmer's markets and promote existing farmer's markets. We will reduce regulated market barriers for local food processors, wineries and craft brewers. These are great opportunities to develop tourism and support our local farmers and entrepreneurs.

3.

The Aggregate Resource Act has not been reviewed in over 15 years. The Act, as it stands, allows for the elimination of prime agricultural land and the Biosphere Reserve known as the Niagara Escarpment. This continues even as over 50 per cent of aggregate is misused and wasted. What will you do, if elected, to see that the Act is reviewed to reflect today's reality of depleting non-renewable resources?

Coalition on the Niagara Escarpment, Hamilton

ONTARIO LIBERAL PARTY

Ontario Liberals believe we can balance our need for aggregate and protect our biodiversity and natural heritage. In 2007, we undertook a study to bring information on aggregate resources in the province up-to-date.

The State of the Aggregate Resource in Ontario Study (SAROS) provided a better understanding of aggregate resources by gathering the most recent information and current science on topics such as resource availability, rehabilitation and recycling.

We will implement the recommendations of the SAROS committee. They include creating a strategic roadmap for effective and sustainable aggregate resource management, developing a new aggregate resources conservation strategy, improving aggregate mapping and promoting increased recycling of aggregates.

In addition, Ontario Liberals will continue investing in Ontario's booming clean energy economy to reduce our dependency on non-renewable resources. The Hudak PCs and Horwath NDP will kill clean energy jobs.

The **ONTARIO PROGRESSIVE CONSERVATIVE PARTY** did not provide an answer to this question.

ONTARIO NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY

The NDP believes that a thorough review of the Aggregate Resource Act is long overdue. It is essential that the right balance be struck between preserving prime agricultural land and unique natural features of the Escarpment region on the one hand and the economic base of the region, on the other. We understand the need to protect and promote jobs but this need not be at the expense of preserving a unique natural environment that attracts visitors from around the world. There is currently an imbalance that the NDP will seek to address.

GREEN PARTY OF ONTARIO

The Green Party would revise the *Aggregate Resources Act* to encourage reuse and recycling of aggregates. We would increase royalty fees for aggregate extraction to fund stewardship programs, and develop a standard for responsible aggregate mining in Ontario. We would also consult with stakeholders to review the requirement for aggregates to be mined close to market. Since much of the demand for aggregates is in the GTA, this places an unsustainable burden on the Niagara Escarpment.

We support amending the *Aggregate Resources Act* to ensure all mega quarries, as defined by the Ministry of Natural Resources, undergo a full Environmental Assessment. For example, given its scale and scope, the proposed mega quarry in Melancthon Township should require a full Environmental Assessment – it currently does not. The *Environmental Assessment Act* was established to deal with projects like this and provides a process that more adequately deals with projects of this size.

4.

Currently, Ontario's Ministry of Transportation is solely mandated to plan for highways. Sustainable, rail and other multimodal transportation options are not within its mandate. If elected, what would you do to change the Ministry of Transportation's mandate to provide comprehensive, multimodal transit and rail options?

Stop Escarpment Highway Coalition, Burlington

ONTARIO LIBERAL PARTY

Ontario Liberals recognize the importance of an integrated transportation system that focuses on all options in order to keep our economy moving. That is why we have expanded the focus of the Ministry of Transportation to include all modes of transportation – including public transit, active transportation and working with our federal

and municipal partners on areas such as marine, rail and air. It is also why we created Metrolinx to plan, coordinate and implement an integrated and seamless regional transit network in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA).

We believe that integrating our transit options is the key to achieving the long term economic prosperity and environmental sustainability of not only the GTHA, but all of Ontario.

The **ONTARIO PROGRESSIVE CONSERVATIVE PARTY** did not provide an answer to this question.

ONTARIO NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY Ontario's NDP would review the Ministry of Transportation's mandate. It makes sense for one Ministry to have sole responsibility for promoting all transportation options including inter-city rail and bus services. We need to provide convenient and affordable transit options to busy Ontario families by building and improving public transit.

GREEN PARTY OF ONTARIO Rising energy prices demand a comprehensive transportation system so that Ontario is prepared to be a leader in the coming low-carbon global economy. Roads and highways are an important part of Ontario's transportation network, but should not be the sole focus of the Ministry of Transportation.

Green MPPs would support an expanded mandate for the Ministry of Transportation. By looking at transportation options as a whole - car, transit, rail, walking and cycling - we will have a stronger, more balanced transportation network for Ontario.

Using powers of zoning and transportation planning, we can design communities that are safe and convenient for walking and cycling to school, work, shopping, entertainment, etc. We can also develop financially sustainable transportation links between communities, that foster local economies, thriving main streets and tourism opportunities.

Green MPPs will oppose the mid-peninsula highway that would pave over Niagara Escarpment.

5. What will your government do in grants and regulation change to increase the amount of land protected by conservation ownership above the present 3.89 per cent for southern Ontario?

Escarpment Biosphere Conservancy, Toronto

ONTARIO LIBERAL PARTY Ontario Liberals have worked closely with conservation groups to acquire lands for biodiversity conservation and the protection of natural heritage. With our partners, we have helped to acquire and permanently protect

11,500 hectares of ecologically sensitive conservation lands. To increase the amount of land protected by conservation ownership, we will continue to support the Eastern Habitat Joint Venture program and the Ontario Land Trust Assistance program. We will also work with partners to look at ways to improve existing programs related to land securement and protection.

Since 2003, Ontario Liberals have already protected more than 2.5 million acres of parks and conservation areas. We created the world's largest greenbelt in southern Ontario, totaling 1.8 million acres. If re-elected, we are committed to preserving an unprecedented 46 million more acres of land in the Far North – a commitment that the NDP and PCs would break.

The **ONTARIO PROGRESSIVE CONSERVATIVE PARTY** did not provide an answer to this question.

ONTARIO NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY The NDP supports setting out achievable timelines to increase conservation ownership in southern Ontario to a new target of 5 per cent and is committed to examining grants and regulations necessary to meet that goal.

GREEN PARTY OF ONTARIO Farmers are in a unique position to create environmental solutions by providing clean air and water, biodiversity and habitat preservation and carbon sequestration. These public benefits improve health, strengthen local economies and responsibly manage natural resources and natural capital.

The Alternative Land Use Services (ALUS) program is an example of a grassroots, farmer-driven, solutions-oriented approach to environmental issues. The Green Party will invest in expanding the ALUS program to reward farmers for good stewardship practices and compensate them for the public benefits of the environmental goods and services that they provide. We would also explore offering landowners tax credits for conservation efforts on their land.

The Green Party will coordinate and consult with farmers, municipalities, and other stakeholders such as Ontario Nature, Ontario Farmland Trust, Bruce Trail Association and the Nature Conservancy of Canada, on ways to expand conservation ownership in southern Ontario.

Find our full platform online at www.itstimeforgreen.ca