

# Pale green, dull and boring

Manitoba not likely to see real change for a high-tech green economy



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In the next provincial election, scheduled for October 2011, both the economy and the environment will play heavily on voters' minds in what may be the most contested race since 1999.

Whichever political party in 2011 can clearly articulate a strong message of both environmental stewardship and economic growth will win. However, given the cautious and at times polarizing context of some issues, such as the proposed Bi-Pole III line down the west side of Lake Winnipeg, Manitobans are likely to be met with a steady-as-she-goes approach.

To its credit, the Manitoba NDP has done some good in bringing environmental issues forward since 1999. Such positives include passing the Water Protection Act, increasing protection of wilderness parks, touting Manitoba Hydro's clean energy advantage and supporting a UNESCO World Heritage site for the part of the Boreal forest that covers predominantly the east side of the province.

However, despite winning numerous awards from *Business Week* and the David Suzuki Foundation, Manitoba still flounders environmentally. It ranks as one of the worst provinces for recycling in Canada; it fared poorly in a 2010 report on provincial environmental policies by *Corporate Knights* magazine, who graded it an F; and it has only maintained stable greenhouse gas emissions since 2000.

What's worse is that the province's green technology innovation sorely lags behind other provinces, including British Columbia and Ontario. Manitoba Hydro's complete dominance of all alternative energy in Manitoba has actually hampered the innovation in terms of fostering competitive markets to make green technology more affordable.

Meanwhile, the Progressive Conservative

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environmental platform is very weak at best, stating on their website that they "understand the importance of preserving our natural heritage and will fight to preserve our environment." They also mention support for clean energy, which for them entails depoliticizing Manitoba Hydro and building the next hydro line on the east side of Lake Winnipeg.

While it may be interesting to note that the PCs would consider depoliticizing Hydro, the idea is very vague and may have people thinking they would consider selling off the Crown corporation, thus turning the election into a referendum on Hydro.

Also, the idea of the PCs wanting to build the Hydro line along the east side of Lake Winnipeg, the same side as the aforementioned UNESCO World Heritage Site, leads one to wonder if they do take the environment into serious consideration as a key platform component.

Perhaps the Liberals have the most interesting environmental solutions, including a PST rebate on purchasing fuel efficient vehicles and incentives to convert vehicles to bio-diesel.

However, despite some unique policy ideas, the Liberals, like the other two major parties here in the province, suffer from a failure to consider that citizens have a participatory stake in the green economy.

All three main political parties say they care – however, one party uses Hydro as the only way to promote alternative energy in the province, one has no consideration for some of the most pristine wilderness in all of Canada and the third is likely to do little more than paint by numbers next election.

What is needed is a serious talk about a real green economy.

How about incentives for small scale competition through consumer co-operatives and community-owned businesses to offer green technologies like wind and solar energy? How about building the infrastructure from north to south for a smart grid that will accelerate energy technology?


Why not provide a framework for increased entrepreneurship in the inner cities that would allow people to make money off green products? Why not a green job training program that would train people for emerging technology industries?

Let's empower people, not force them to be little more than spectators after election day.

Manitobans deserve better. Unfortunately, with the leadership exhibited by all three parties, Manitoba will still see a very pale green environmental action plan after October 2011.

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September 21 & 22, 2010  
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