

Liberal Party of Canada

Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative

Investment

The Great Lakes and St. Lawrence constitute the largest source of fresh water in the world. The US Federal Government committed \$475 million to Great Lakes restoration and protection initiatives in 2010 alone, exclusive of infrastructure investments, and likely will appropriate between \$200 and \$300 million in 2011. Only \$8 million was committed to non-infrastructure Great Lakes protection programs in last year's federal budget and only \$ 16 million was committed by the Federal Government to the St. Lawrence Plan last year. Canada's declining investment in the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence is not keeping pace with American investments and is insufficient to maintain and enhance the quality of this global resource.

- i) **If your party forms the next Government of Canada (or if your party is in opposition), would you increase the federal financial commitment to the protection and restoration of the Great Lakes (exclusive of infrastructure) next year, and if so, by how much?**

See combined response below

- ii) **In its pre-budget submission, the Cities Initiative proposed the creation of a \$50 million/year Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Sustainability Fund for locally-directed nearshore protection measures in any communities within the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence basin. If your party formed the next Government of Canada (or if your party is in opposition), would you create such a Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Sustainability Fund?**

While Canada sits among the top 5 countries with the most renewable water, the majority of our water flows northward, away from our main population centres. Thus, as demands for water increase through population growth, commercial expansion, and increasing need for irrigation primarily in the southern part of the country, so too will the strain on water resources. Moreover, leaky, aging water pipes mean that as a whole, Canadian communities face billions of dollars in water infrastructure deficit.

To maintain the water quality we are accustomed to, Canadians must start using our freshwater more efficiently while working to protect this vital resource. To do this, Canada needs a plan: a freshwater strategy.

A Liberal government will work with the provinces and stakeholders to develop a new *Canadian Freshwater Strategy*, the first comprehensive federal water policy in over 20 years. To be effective, the strategy will aim to address the broad range of issues threatening our most precious resource including pollution, inefficient use, nutrient over-loading, drought, flooding, and invasive species, among others. The objective of the Strategy will be to preserve Canada's freshwater heritage for the generations to come. That will include protecting our water resources from being subject to bulk exports.

A Liberal government's focus on freshwater will also bolster efforts to clean up key water basins by investing \$100 million, rising to \$125 million annually, to:

- Restore degraded and threatened areas across the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence regions;
- Support efforts to clean up Lake Winnipeg, which suffers from excess levels of phosphorus and nitrogen;
- Advance research and improve efforts to protect freshwater ecosystems from invasive species such as Asian carp.

A Liberal government will also be sensitive to the fact that in addition to falling primarily under provincial jurisdiction, many water issues are very local in nature, and those best equipped to identify and address them are the affected communities themselves. Thus, a Canadian Freshwater Strategy will seek to provide the leadership and tools to enable local actors to implement the most effective solutions.

A Canadian Freshwater Strategy will go hand-in-hand with Liberal initiatives that will ensure Canada is best positioned to take advantage of the changes in global markets and technologies to secure renewed prosperity while protecting our natural endowments.

Infrastructure

New federal wastewater treatment standards are expected to come into effect later this year. The regulations will require communities to rebuild or replace more than 25 per cent of Canada's 3,500 wastewater treatment systems. The necessary infrastructure upgrades are estimated to cost \$13 billion over the next 3 decades, and an additional \$30 billion if upgrades to bring systems into compliance with current standards are factored in.

iii) What is your government's plan to help cities meet federal wastewater standards?

In addition to maintaining the Gas Tax Fund transfer to fund community infrastructure projects, a Liberal government will provide leadership, working with other levels of government to put in

place a Canadian Transportation and Infrastructure Strategy that targets long-term economic benefits.

This strategy will underpin a next generation of programming. In a time of record high fiscal deficits and infrastructure deficits, realism, cooperation, clear thinking and tough choices will be necessary. A Liberal government will bring clarity and coherence to the federal role in infrastructure. Liberal infrastructure priorities include municipal infrastructure, particularly for water and sewers to meet local needs and reduce pollution, and major public multi-function spaces;

Leadership

Over a number of years, action on Great Lakes and St. Lawrence protection has been delayed on several fronts. Negotiations on the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement, the Canada-Ontario Agreement Respecting the Great Lakes Ecosystem and the St. Lawrence Plan have all been delayed. Investment in the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence has not been made a priority. And very little political attention has been given to the greatest source of fresh water in the world. Political leadership on the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence is sorely needed.

- iv) If your party formed the next Government of Canada (or if your party is in opposition), would you commit to demonstrating political leadership in the protection of precious water resources in Canada, including the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence, and if so, how would you do this?**

Please see response to questions under “Investment”

Spills Prevention

Last year, Canada’s Environmental Commissioner, Scott Vaughan, released a report in which he concluded that that Canada’s spills prevention and preparedness regime is outdated and lacks a formal framework with clearly defined roles and responsibilities for responding to chemical spills.

- v) If your party forms the next Government of Canada (or if your party is in opposition), would you update Canada’s spills prevention and preparedness regime? Including :
- a special focus on the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Region

- a formal framework for responding to chemical spills
- a prevention and response plan to address new and changing products in maritime cargo on the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence, including light petroleum products, new chemicals, and other new cargo materials

Indeed, in his Fall 2010 report, the Commissioner on the Environment and Sustainable Development highlighted that, “Every day on average, at least one oil spill is reported to the Canadian Coast Guard. Fortunately, most are small. However, given the findings of this audit, I am troubled that the government is not ready to respond to a major spill.” Liberals believe this is unacceptable.

A Liberal government will work together with provincial and territorial counterparts to conduct an independent review of Canada’s oil spill prevention and response capability, including the legislative and regulatory regimes, and capacities and practices in place across the country for prevention and remediation of oil spills. Drawing on this review, a Liberal government will create a world-leading oil spill contingency plan for Canada to ensure the very best emergency and safety measures are part of the cost of doing business.

Given that billions of dollars will be spent on clean up in Gulf of Mexico, a Liberal government will put in place new liability limits to ensure taxpayers are not left to pay for the clean-up of a major spill.

A Liberal government will drive the development of a Canadian Freshwater Strategy, outlined above under “Investment”. This will contribute to maintaining the quality of water in the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Basin.

St. Lawrence River

The St. Lawrence River is already feeling the effects of climate change with severe storms and tides causing acute erosion in the St. Lawrence estuary and gulf areas as well as lower water levels in the Montreal region.

- vi) If your party forms the next Government of Canada (or if your party is in opposition), would you create an assistance program for cities along the St. Lawrence to address or adapt to the effects of climate change?**

For 20 years, the Government of Canada and the Government of Quebec have worked together to formulate and implement five-year St. Lawrence Plans to protect, conserve and enhance the St. Lawrence ecosystem, taking a sustainable development approach. Key to its

implementation has been the 14 ZIP committees (Zones d'intervention prioritaire –areas of prime concern) that work at the local level to restore the shores of the St. Lawrence. However, by avoiding the formulation and implementation of a climate change plan and refusing to contribute new money to the *Fifth St. Lawrence Plan*, the Conservatives have left the communities up and down the shores of the St. Lawrence vulnerable to pollution, falling water levels, as well as severe storms.

In November and January, Liberal Members of Parliament Francis Scarpaleggia, Denis Coderre, Marc Garneau, together with candidate Nancy Charest, visited the Gaspé region of Quebec to better understand the challenges communities are facing with increasingly severe storms as a result of climate change.

A Liberal government will support efforts in vulnerable and affected communities to reinforce their shorelines and protect their cities. Consistent with plans for a National Water Strategy, a Liberal government will commit, among other things, to collaborate in a serious and responsible way in the development of the next *St. Lawrence Plan*. In addition, a Liberal government will consider funding ecological projects aimed at protecting and strengthening riverbanks and shorelines as part of a "renaturalization" of banks aimed at significantly lessening the effects of erosion caused by heavy rains and storms.

Moreover, a Liberal government will take strong action to address the root causes of severe storms and climate change: greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. This will include the implementation of a cap and trade system across all industries and equitable across regions. We will provide funding for a \$13,500 Green Renovation Tax Credit so that families can improve the energy efficiency of their home. And finally, we will provide \$1 billion in funding for a Renewable Power Production Incentive to support the innovation and market development of clean technology. These will help achieve permanent reductions in GHG emissions and hopefully limit the impacts of climate change in Canada and around the world.