



Owner-Operator's Business
Association of Canada

Association professionnelle des
routiers autonomes du Canada

*...from the
director's chair*

Vote for, vote against...just vote

Here we go again. With yet another general election looming – our third in just over four years and seven trips to provincial polls in just over a year – it's sometimes difficult to determine when the campaigning stops and the governing starts.

And here I come again, haranguing you to get off your butts and vote. There's no excuse anymore why you can't. Voting in a Canadian federal election is one of the few things that's actually easy for truck drivers to do, despite hectic and unpredictable schedules, and pretty good odds that you'll be miles from home on election day.

With our National Register of Electors, the permanent computerized database of Canadians who are qualified to vote, you're already on the voter's list, and will be mailed a voter information card by Elections Canada prior to the election. It shows that you're registered, and tells you when and where to vote.

If for some reason you don't receive a card, a toll-free call to Elections Canada (800-463-6868) will get you on the list. But even without a card, you can still register to vote at the polling station on election day by proving your identity and address.

If you can't vote on election day (Oct. 14), you can vote earlier at an advance poll (Oct. 3, 4 and 6), or you can skip the line-ups altogether and vote by mail. To do this, you'll need a special ballot which you can get from Elections Canada, either through the Web site (www.elections.ca) or by telephone. You can mail that ballot anytime, from anywhere in the world, in the envelope provided.

Promises fill the air during a campaign – some even include the word “trucking” to get us excited. But is Stephen Harper's promise to cut the federal excise tax on fuel from four cents to two cents a litre – over four years – going to solve the industry's cost-related problems? Is Stephane Dion's second-thought addition of a bundle of rebates and incentives enough to sell us on his Green Shift plan which would *increase* the federal diesel tax by seven cents a litre?

Is any of Jack Layton's \$8 billion funding for green-collar jobs coming your way?

Most of us old enough to have a few elections

under our belts are sceptical or downright cynical when it comes to election promises. It's not without reason truckers often feel invisible; our day-to-day concerns can easily get lost in discussions on key issues like the economy, the environment, leadership, and consumer confidence.

Even the promise of fuel tax cuts and green incentive programs for trucking aren't for the benefit of truckers themselves – you're supposed to pass the benefits on to consumers by lowering the price of moving their stuff by truck. Since when are truckers not consumers too?

But before I get any more cynical about being cynical, I want to point out that elections are about a lot more than which political party we'll vote into office.

The whole campaign process provides a perfect opportunity to raise trucking issues with the politicians who'll be knocking at your door looking for your vote.

Our “first past the post” electoral system means that the candidate who wins your riding will represent you in Parliament, regardless of which party forms the government. When the dust settles, that person is the one who will be sitting in the House, working on committees, debating issues, and voting on Bills.

Although trucking issues aren't likely to top the Prime Minister's priority list, an MP who understands this industry and its issues will be more helpful than one who doesn't know trucking from page two.

While the federal government has relatively little jurisdiction over transportation compared to provincial governments, there is no shortage of issues for truckers to discuss with political hopefuls.

The environment? Canada needs a comprehensive green plan, not a mish-mash of conflicting policies and regulations. We need practical, accessible, incentive programs that will support small business truck owners who are struggling with the high cost of adopting green technologies.

Our crumbling infrastructure and lack of rest areas and truck parking puts drivers at risk on a daily basis. It's time the feds showed some

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leadership in addressing these problems, rather than squabbling with provinces over funding and jurisdiction.

When they're laying out their plans for economic renewal, politicians need to be reminded that the economy moves by truck. Shippers rely on Canadian truckers to move 75% of the freight with our largest trading partner to the south, and Ottawa can't continue to ignore the ever-thickening Canada/US border that adds cost and inefficiencies to cross-border trucking.

And perhaps it's time to dust off the report of the Federal Labour Standards Review Commission for another look labour issues in interprovincial trucking – including the Pandora's box of driver pay.

We're still waiting for fair treatment for sole proprietor owner/operators with respect to meal tax allowances, and we need a government with the guts to give Marine Atlantic a good shake-up rather than tax the trucking industry with rate hikes to pay for the crown corporation's inefficiencies.

And the list goes on. So when the candidates come around asking for your support, let them know what's on your mind.

Talk to them about the industry and what changes you want to see, then ask them how they're prepared to support *you*.

I know cliches about exercising your right to vote start to wear thin after awhile, but here's one to think about: bad politicians are elected by good people who don't vote. Still not convinced that your vote can make a difference? Just ask Elizabeth May what can happen when Canadians get mad and speak up. □