



Owner-Operator's Business
Association of Canada
Association professionnelle des
routiers autonomes du Canada

...from the
director's chair

Vote for, vote against, but vote

According to 17th century English political philosopher Thomas Hobbes, life is “nasty, brutish and short” for individuals in a state of nature, that is, not governed by a strong undivided political power.

Replace “short” with “interminably long” and you’ve got a pretty good definition of the federal election campaign underway – not only is it the longest in Canadian history, it’s likely to be the most nasty and brutish battle ever witnessed in this country, not to mention the most expensive.

With the three major parties in a dead heat heading into the election, the outcome is anybody’s guess: to paraphrase the Toronto Star pundits, whether Harper’s Conservatives score a rare, fourth straight win, or Canadians elect their first ever NDP government, or the Liberals rebound from the political penalty box, this electoral contest promises to be one for the history books. By the time you read this, you’ve probably heard everyone’s opinion on every conceivable issue, so I have no intention of going there. Instead, I’m here to harangue you to act on your own opinion, and vote.

There’s absolutely 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 telling you when and where to vote. If you’re not sure whether or not you’re registered, help is only a mouse-click away on the Elections Canada Web site (www.elections.ca) where you can check or update your voter registration, or even register online. If you can’t vote on election day (Oct. 19), you can vote earlier at one of four advance polls (Oct. 9, 10, 11 and 12) or anytime at one of 400 Elections Canada offices across the country. 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 or by telephone. You can mail that ballot anytime, from anywhere in the world, in the envelope provided.

So now we’ve established that there’s no excuse for not casting your vote, why the heck should you?

Most of us old enough to have a few elections under our belts are skeptical or downright cynical when it comes to campaign rhetoric and 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 and national security. But 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 political hopefuls 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 a Prime Minister’s priority list, an MP who understands this industry and its issues will be more helpful than one who doesn’t. 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. When they’re laying out their plans for economic renewal, politicians need to be reminded the economy moves by truck.

Infrastructure investment is probably the most tangible way average Canadians see their governments in action, so infrastructure dollars – both spent and promised – are a popular tool for governments before and during an election.

But we need politicians to understand that infrastructure is so much more than public transit and a few miles of twinning and a new overpass here and there. Our crumbling infrastructure and lack of rest areas and truck parking puts drivers



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at risk on a daily basis. It’s time the feds showed some leadership in addressing these problems, rather than squabbling with provinces over funding and jurisdiction. The environment? Here’s another area where an enlightened federal government could show more leadership. Canada needs a comprehensive green plan, not a patchwork of conflicting policies and regulations. And we need practical, accessible, incentive programs at all levels that support an industry struggling with the high cost of adopting green technologies that would not only help improve fuel economy and GHG reduction today, but would also give trucking a leg up in meeting tighter and more expensive regulation only a couple of years away. Many labour and human resource issues facing trucking fall under the purview of the federal government. A regime that is truly concerned with labour shortages – critically acute in the trucking industry – needs to be reminded that its stubborn refusal to recognize trucking as a skilled trade disqualifies young, under-employed or displaced workers from the very programs that have been put in place to ensure adequate, affordable training is available to thousands of Canadians to fill empty jobs.

And don’t let any candidate off the hook in discussing overtime pay for truck drivers as outlined in Part III (Labour Standards) of the Canada Labour Code, a mandate that government – along with a good part of the industry – would rather no one talked about. 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 clichés about exercising your right to vote start to wear thin after a while, but here’s one to think about: bad politicians are elected by good people who don’t vote.