

National Post

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Of ethics and animals

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In the din of an election campaign, it's hard for so-called "fringe parties" to make their voices heard. This week, the National Post gives smaller parties the chance to tell you what they're all about -and why you might consider giving them your vote.

The Animal Alliance Environment Voters party (AAEV) seeks to elect candidates who will fight for effective animal and environmental protection policies. In this election, however, AAEV's candidates are campaigning for something more crucial to the Canadian way of life: a government that respects the rule of law, the principles of democracy and the values of most Canadians. Little progress can be made on protecting the environment and animals, or on other issues, if our country is run by unethical politicians who maintain personal power by trafficking in secrecy, deceit, lawlessness, vendetta, favouritism, election rigging and contempt of Parliament.

Among the world's wealthy nations, Canada has one of the worst environmental and animal-protection records. For Stephen Harper and his Conservatives, however, that's not good enough: They are striving to be dead last. And even that, it seems, is not their ultimate goal. Harper's government has reduced the scope and effectiveness of the few, mostly ineffective, animal and environmental protections that Canada still has, and has tried to undermine the environmental and animal protection policies of other nations.

Globally, Harper is sabotaging efforts to protect us from the most dangerous environmental threat humankind has ever faced -climate change. In Europe, he is spending over \$10-million on a World Trade Organization challenge to force European countries to trade in the cruel and bloody spoils of the largest authorized marine mammal slaughter in the world: Canada's money-losing, environmentally destructive, commercial seal hunt. In Ottawa, Harper named former journalist Peter Kent his environment minister. Kent's first act as environment minister had nothing to do with protecting the environment. He appeared on CBC television's Power and Politics to shill for oil from Alberta's greenhouse gasspewing tar sands. Kent is the Conservative candidate in the Toronto-area riding of Thornhill. Liz White, leader of AAEV, is also a candidate in Thornhill. White has little chance of winning the seat, but she can alert Thornhill voters to the contempt that Harper and Kent have for environmental and animal protection and, more importantly, for ethical government.

AAEV has worked on animal and environmental protection issues with most political parties. While fielding its own candidates, AAEV has also actively supported and opposed candidates of other parties. What's important to AAEV is not party affiliation, but policies. Most parties have a mixed record on environmental and animal protection. What's important politically is that on Election Day voters reward parties with good records, and punish those with bad ones.

Until now, all of our political partners and opponents have shared a fundamental value: a belief in ethical government that serves the interests of all constituents, founded on the rule of law, openness and transparency, on reaching consensus between political friend and foe and on making our cities, provinces and country better places for everyone. The exception is the Harper government. A raft of Harper aides, advisors, Conservative party colleagues and Senators have either been charged with offences, including breaking Canada's election laws or are under active investigation by the RCMP. Critics of the Harper government's treatment of veterans have had their personal, confidential medical records illegally accessed and distributed, and used in vendettas against them. The Harper government has been found in contempt of Parliament by the Speaker of the House of Commons, for not being truthful about the costs of fighter jets and jails. Harper has gagged government scientists and other public servants, preventing them from speaking openly and honestly to the Canadian people and the press. The Conservative government divides

Canadians into friends to be rewarded and foes to be crushed. Under such a wilfully unethical and mean-spirited administration, little progress is possible on protecting the environment and animals, or on most issues that affect the lives and livelihoods of most Canadians.

The issue in this election is not "the economy, stupid," as Harper hopes Canadians will believe. The economy has been doing fine, thanks to a minority government that forced the Conservatives to admit there was a recession and implement economic measures that spared Canadians the worst of it. The issue in this election, on which AAEV candidates are campaigning, is deposing the Harper regime and electing an ethical government.

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