



Canada's
independent
on-line source of
news you can use



Sponsor:

Ontario English
Catholic Teachers Association

Tuesday, November 26, 2002

Saving you money - Protecting your rights - Untangling spin

NEW Content Regularly

[[Front Page](#)] [[Future of the Left](#)] [[Feedback](#)] [[Site Search](#)] [[Web Search](#)]

Canadians split over Kyoto support

The political question isn't Kyoto vs. made in Canada; it's whether Canadians are ready to sacrifice to cool the planet

Dateline: Monday, November 18, 2002

by Marc Zwelling, President, Vector Research + Development Inc.

After a decade a relatively benign federal-provincial relations Canadians are splitting again, but it's not Québec sovereignty – it's the environment.

Alberta's Conservative Party government, led by premier Ralph Klein, has launched a campaign to halt the federal Liberals' plan to enact the greenhouse gas rollbacks required in the 1998 Kyoto Accord.

Kyoto corporate opponents are running TV commercials. Klein is barnstorming the country to warn that ratifying Kyoto would be economic suicide.

In a fight between Klein and Chrétien the prime minister has more credibility.

In an EKOS Research poll in October, 39 percent would trust the prime minister's musings on the environment while 30 percent would trust Klein (31 percent couldn't express a view).

In Alberta the numbers are entirely different. Klein wins the public's trust in his own bailiwick, 59 percent to 20 percent. Prime minister Jean Chrétien apparently sees Kyoto as a closing chapter in his long political career and seems committed to ratifying it. Foes and supporters each point to polls showing the public is on their side.

In September half of those polled in a national survey by CROP, the Québec-based pollsters, hadn't heard of Kyoto. This month 69 percent were aware of it, but 63 percent admitted to IPSOS-Reid interviewers, "I don't think I have enough information... to say whether I support it or oppose it."

So what are the polls measuring? This isn't public opinion but public non-opinion.

Since Klein and big business yelled "fire" the public has become more ambivalent about Kyoto.

Typically when people have just started pondering a new major public policy their

attitudes are unsettled. In last August's Léger Marketing national poll 72 percent supported ratification. In September 81 percent supported the agreement in the CROP survey.

In early October a poll by Environics Research commissioned by the Alberta government found that 72 percent of the province's adults wanted the federal government to withdraw from the accord and develop a made in Canada solution to reducing greenhouse gas. Only 19 percent said ratify. In the IPSOS-Reid survey in early November, the yardsticks were virtually the same in Alberta, 74 percent to 25 percent for the made in Canada approach.

Asking about a "made in Canada" policy serves to reduce support in the polls for Kyoto. "Kyoto" – the word – sounds exotic and foreign-made, an imported solution looking for a problem.

In early November an IPSOS-Reid poll found that only 43 percent across the country want the federal government to ratify it while 49 percent said the government should withdraw from Kyoto and develop "a made in Canada" plan for reducing domestic greenhouse gas emissions.

- In November in a national SES Canada Research poll, 55 percent said the government should not ratify the accord "until there is a better understanding of its impact on the economy."
- Just 32 percent said, instead, "Canada needs to ratify the Kyoto Accord as proposed by the federal Liberal government because it will have a positive impact on our environment."

Including language about the "Liberal government" creates the impression of wider opposition to Kyoto. Among Canadian Alliance voters, 87 percent charged the red flag of "Liberal government" and opposed Kyoto.

Overall Canadians continue to back Kyoto – when polls don't dangle the made in Canada option. In the November IPSOS-Reid poll 74 percent backed ratification while 19 percent opposed it.

Support has collapsed in Alberta, however. In August Albertans backed Kyoto by 55 percent-21 percent but now oppose it by 60 percent-40 percent.

Job-loss fears don't faze most Canadians but do reduce support for ratification

In the CROP study, even after being told it "could lead to important decreases in investments from the United States to Canada," 58 percent said sign it.

- Even after being told it "could have a significant negative impact on Canada's economic growth," 63 percent said ratify it.

This month in the IPSOS-Reid survey, instead of 63 percent bucking the job-loss argument, only 51 percent said Canada should ratify "even if it means significant costs to the economy and changes to the lifestyles of Canadians."

Support for Kyoto rests on long-held sympathy for tougher environmental regulation even if it costs jobs

Reducing greenhouse gases and combating global warming are Canadians' two favourite green causes, according to a poll by IPSOS-Reid conducted in September for the University of British Columbia.

- 22 percent name greenhouse gases and 23 percent climate change as the environmental issues "our governments should pay the most attention to."

Trailing on the green issues list were spending money to encourage individuals to make environmentally sustainable lifestyle choices (16 percent), chemicals in food (15 percent), loss of old growth forests through logging (10 percent), genetically altered food (6 percent), and the state of global fisheries (5 percent). Counting first and second choices, reducing greenhouse gas (43 percent) and global warming (38 percent) were runaway favourite green causes.

In the UBC poll 69 percent agreed "protecting the natural environment is more important to me than creating economic growth and employment."

- 79 percent agreed strongly "individuals have to change their own habits and lifestyles if we are to protect the environment."

Kyoto is the only concrete big idea around today to purify the environment. So Kyoto is where most Canadians cast their environmental ballots

In November's IPSOS-Reid poll 79 percent agreed the federal government "needs to spend more time investigating the cost and impact" of Kyoto before implementing it. But nearly as many, 71 percent, said "even if there are some problems" with it "it should be implemented because it is a good first step."

The "made in Canada" language serves to conceal public opinion instead of illuminating it. Kyoto foes have seized "made in Canada" as their rallying cry to intimidate Kyoto supporters

The subtle xenophobia underneath "made in Canada" aims to taint Kyoto advocates as unpatriotic. (What could Ralph Klein say if the climate change summit had been held in Calgary instead of Japan?)

As the polls show, a "made in Canada" policy to cut greenhouse gas would make people feel better. Supporters should re-name their ratification effort the "Canadian Kyoto Clean Air Agreement."

The political question isn't Kyoto vs. made in Canada; it's whether Canadians are ready to sacrifice to cool the planet. They say they are, but separating the garbage into blue boxes is fairly easy compared with lowering the body heat of the earth. Until they are faced with renouncing their SUVs or paying more for gasoline or hydroelectric power, who will know?

Marc Zwelling conducts polls in Canada and the US for unions and other clients

and creates communication strategies with conventional and interactive media. He can be reached at polls@vectorresearch.com.

[[Features List](#)]

[[Front Page](#)] [[Feedback](#)]

[[Send the URL for this page to a friend](#)]

© **Straight Goods, 2000-2002. All Rights Reserved.**

Straight Goods respects the intellectual property of our contributors.

We expect our visitors will as well.

For comments or suggestions, please contact webmaster@straightgoods.com

Site built and maintained by [Perfect Vision \(Productions\) Inc.](#)

