



Policy Editor L. Ian MacDonald and Green Party Leader Elizabeth May during their Q&A in Montreal, September 25, 2015. Policy photo

Q&A: A Conversation With Elizabeth May

On the morning after the first French-language leaders' debate, Green Party Leader Elizabeth May sat for a Q&A in Montreal with Policy Editor and iPolitics columnist L. Ian MacDonald. Of course, climate change was top of mind, as was the evolution of Canada's global reputation under the Harper government. And May's emphatic lack of ambiguity on the question of what makes Canada great.

Policy: In a minority House, which we may well have after the 19th of October, are there any circumstances under which the Green Party could work with Mr. Harper?

Elizabeth May: Of course there are, but I don't think Mr. Harper would be willing to create those circumstances. I think the hypothetical answer might be, "Sure, hypothetically he suddenly says 'I've decided Canada should be a leader at climate change meetings in Paris and we are going to come in with new targets and we are going to be prepared.'" No, the reality is knowing Stephen Harper's record and his personal views on climate. We absolutely have to work with someone else. I meant it when I said last night that we would not be able to succeed in Paris if Stephen Harper remains prime minister.

Policy: Well, let's say we had kind of a 1972 Parliament, a hung Parliament, and he had 168 seats and you had three and you had the balance of power. What would your terms be?

Elizabeth May: Very clearly they would be that we have to work on climate urgently and that includes no Kinder Morgan expansion and tankers on the B.C. coastline. Because it doesn't make sense but I won't dive deeply into that one, I'll just say top conditions are climate, getting rid of first-past-the-post, repealing C-51 and reducing the powers of the Prime Minister's Office.

Policy: And if those four items were in the Speech From the Throne, could you vote for it?

Elizabeth May: Yes. One of the things we would need to do with any of the parties with whom we were talking would be to give them the assurance that on a legitimate money bill, confidence vote, we would not bring down their government. But I prefer to sit in opposition and be able to influence and hold government to account, but be very clear about repealing C-51, climate action and the democratic reform pieces—if those things are fixed, then we're in a good position to say to whatever other minority government we're helping "Don't worry, we won't bring down your government as long as these things are done."

Policy: So you would take some power away from our executive branch and return it to the legislative branch?

Elizabeth May: Well, we'll really need to bring in a series of reforms because the things that were unthinkable in the past in terms of prime ministerial abuse of power—once a prime minister abuses power to the extent that Stephen Harper has you actually need legislation to constrain the Prime Minister's Office. So our budget cuts the budget of the Prime Minister's Office in half. We also need to bring in legislation that says you can't prorogue without a vote in the House. We need to amend at least our standing orders to ensure that omnibus budget bills are no longer allowed to run to hun-

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dreds of pages and change unrelated laws that have nothing to do with the budget. There are a lot of pieces that need to be fixed that weren't of concern before because no previous prime minister would have attempted them.

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Policy: The environment is the Green Party's signature issue and you as a person have worked on these issues since the time of the Acid Rain Accord and the Montreal Protocol on ozone depletion.

Elizabeth May: Even before, I've been doing environmental work since I was in high school. But yes, professionally the work on the Montreal Protocol in 1987 is one of the things that I'm most proud of.

Policy: There isn't a hole in the sky anymore.

Elizabeth May: That's right. I mean there is no question former Prime Minister Brian Mulroney did a huge number of things for the environment.

Policy: That was my next question. How do you see Canada's role in the

environment, its world leadership role now compared to then?

Elizabeth May: There is no comparison—that is what is so tragic. When I go to international climate meetings the fact that I am the leader of the Green Party of Canada and not allowed on my own government's delegation by the current prime minister doesn't lessen the intense animosity from people around the world at seeing anyone from Canada. That's really heartbreaking. When you are really proud of your country and you go to international meetings to find that just being Canadian is enough to be hated. That's how much damage Stephen Harper has done to our reputation.

Policy: An agenda for Paris and COP21. If Canada has endorsed President Obama on the 30/30 reduction—30 per cent below 2005 levels of GHG emissions by 2030—isn't that a good start?

Elizabeth May: No it's not good. We can't be talking about good starts. Back at the Warsaw meeting it was determined that we were going to have to put in commitments early because we didn't want to have happen what happened in Copenhagen, which was governments show up and throw together a deal papering over the cracks and say we've just accomplished something. So this is why we have the UN officials now adding up the collectivity of the targets countries are prepared to meet as they go into these negotiations to say "Will that level of reduction be sufficient to avoid two degrees global average temperature increase above what the global average temperature was before the industrial revolution?" And I know that that framing, immediately people's eyes



Looking ahead to COP21 in Paris, Elizabeth May says: “We have 40 days between the election and the opening of the climate talks.” *Policy* photo.

glaze over, what do you mean two degrees, what do you mean before the industrial revolution? But that’s a commitment Stephen Harper took Canada to. This is what we have to do. So do the collectivity of current commitments from all governments add up to being enough to avoid two degrees? No. That’s why I say it can’t just be a good start. We have 40 days between the election and the opening of climate talks. We are going to need to do a complete round of all the provinces, if not a first minister’s meeting. We are going to have to increase our commitment and push Obama to increase his.

Policy: Hillary Clinton the other day came out against Keystone under pressure, I think, from some of her own donors in California and so forth and from Bernie Sanders on the left of the Democratic Party. Nevertheless she has made this in-

tervention in the middle of a Canadian election campaign. What’s your sense of that?

Elizabeth May: I haven’t found any Canadians yet who have read the State Department’s environmental assessment of Keystone but Stephen Harper often says it got a green light from its environmental assessment. It didn’t. What the environmental assessment says was: As long as the price of a barrel of oil stays high, Keystone won’t have an impact on greenhouse gases. But if the price of oil drops below \$80 a barrel, Keystone will promote greenhouse gases because it will be a factor in pushing for expansion of the oil sands. So she is actually well within a sensible rationale coming out against it and she had to come out against it. You are absolutely right—a climate champion like Bernie Sanders running so well in the Democratic race,

is clearly affecting Hillary Clinton’s policies. Isn’t it a shame that same dynamic isn’t happening in Canada?

Policy: Mrs. Clinton has called, as you have, for a North American climate compact. What is your sense of that?

Elizabeth May: What’s interesting is that Stephen Harper called for that, too, when he thought there was no chance of Obama moving. So it gave him cover for a number of years, the what we call the “waiting for Obama” strategy and by the time Obama started moving it was as if everybody in Canada had forgotten that Stephen Harper had said that we wanted a North American cap and trade plan, isn’t that interesting? So, yes it absolutely makes sense. The details of her statement make sense and are very much like the Green Party policies. She is talking about better rail safety, absolutely. She is talking about improving electricity grid infrastructure, which we are calling for as well. More efforts on conservation—and she’s talking about shutting down coal and having transition payments for workers who are dependent on coal mining. So it’s a sensible set of policies.

Policy: Pipelines. You are opposed to all of them I think.

Elizabeth May: Opposed to them as long as they are piping bitumen mixed with diluent. Yes and that’s all the proposals.

Policy: The question is how do we get our resources to tidewater, or do we just leave them in the ground in the oil sands?

Elizabeth May: There’s an intermediate option, which is that the two million barrels of bitumen a day that is produced in Northern Alberta should be refined here, and this was by the way the plan right up to 2008. No one was talking about pipelines for raw bitumen until the economic collapse and the plans for upgraders that were on the horizon for development in Northern Alberta were withdrawn because of the financial crunch. As the economy recovered no one came back to building upgraders in Northern Alberta

and instead we had Keystone and Enbridge and Kinder Morgan, then Energy East. There is no way in this world that it makes sense for Canada economically to ship out raw bitumen and it certainly means that it is part of a strategy economically of high volume production of a low value product for export. We should be not expanding the oil sands at all.

Policy: I wonder, with all these issues of social licence and environmental approvals and First Nations buy-in, would the TransCanada Pipeline or the CPR even be built today?

Elizabeth May: Yes, probably. The problem with the pipelines is that people recognize that there is a link. You're boosting greenhouse gases and threatening our kids' future at the same time that you are proposing to ship a product that no one knows how to clean up. The Enbridge spill in the Kalamazoo River was a real wake-up call because up to that point even the environmental movement wasn't aware that bitumen mixed with diluent was impossible to clean up. Bitumen, I mean the fact that to ship this stuff—which no one really wants to talk about—it's a two-way flow of toxic products. If you want to take bitumen and stick it in a pipeline, it's solid, it doesn't flow. So they have to ship toxic diluent to Northern Alberta, to stir, and diluent is basically a fossil fuel condensate, they throw in benzene and butane. So you stir that into the bitumen to make it flowable. By the way at the other end before you process the bitumen you have to remove all the diluent. It's not a product, it is just a way of moving something that is a solid.

Policy: So you say we should in effect be building clean refineries in Alberta.

Elizabeth May: Absolutely.

Policy: Which was actually Peter Lougheed's position.

Elizabeth May: Exactly. Our position is very close to Peter Lougheed's—act like an owner. There is a principle for you, I mean, what happened with the amount of foreign ownership in the oil sands and the willingness to allow those foreign owners to get the bitumen to their refineries in other

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countries. Number one issue for my community—everyone in Vancouver Island—is pipelines to tidewater. The other day we did an event with Arthur Black, he said he heard Tom Mulcair talking about getting this to tidewater, he said “Mr. Mulcair that's not tidewater that's my front yard.” Well, that's how we feel in B.C. We do not want an increase of tankers loaded with bitumen and diluent because we know it can't be cleaned up in fresh water and we don't have any reason to think it can be cleaned up in the marine environment either.

Policy: Let's move to governance. Senate reform, free votes, first past the post, these are important issues for you. On the Senate, Mr. Mulcair talks about abolishing it, Mr. Harper seems to want to abolish it by attrition. The Supreme Court has said “You can't do that”. In their landmark decision they said that the Senate was a “foundational” institution, that it was the intent of the founding fathers to create a bicameral legislature, one elected rep by pop and the other appointed, rep by region. So what's your thought for Senate reform?

Elizabeth May: Well, first I'd like to say that Mr. Harper's declaration that he doesn't plan to appoint any more Senators is unconstitutional. The Senate in my view didn't need reforming until Stephen Harper wrecked it. You look at fine Senators like Lowell Murray. People who now comment on what is happening. The Senate used to actually operate, you know, there were always Senators who abused the privilege, lived in Mexico or whatever, but other than those offbeat few, the Senate used to have real respect.

Policy: What you are talking about is kind of an appointment process by merit.

Elizabeth May: Yes, but the reality

right now is the public appetite for reform. By the way, the Green Party policy, just to be clear; our members have voted to say the Senate should be elected and should be elected by proportional representation.

Policy: That would be a 7/50 amendment.

Elizabeth May: You can do, that but you do have to open the Constitution.

Policy: Okay, free votes.

Elizabeth May: Our party is nothing but free votes. It's a position of the Green Party of Canada's members it's a rule that we will never whip votes.

Policy: First-past-the-post.

Elizabeth May: Must be removed. It is the most perverse voting system possible and the main reason I want to remove it is not because it advantages the Greens, although that is what ends up being in the paper. You look at first-past-the-post. It is the only system, as Peter Russell, Professor Emeritus at the U of T has observed, it is the only system that possibly allows a minority of the public to elect a majority government. The other really horrible thing about it, and I've discovered this by being in politics, is that it enforces a perverse toxicity, it creates the hostility between parties that are closest to each other on the political spectrum. For instance, the Liberals and the NDP will worry that cooperation one with the other will undermine their ability in the next election to say “Only vote for us.” If we can move to proportional representation we should have a much more cooperative, respectful Parliament and type of politics as a result.

Policy: Okay on health care. You put out a platform plank on Pharmacare the other day and \$11 billion was your number.

Elizabeth May: That is what we will save. We won't spend \$11 billion. This is a number that comes from a really landmark study called "Pharmacare 2020" that came out in July. We've had a policy for Pharmacare in the last election as well but the numbers are clear and strong that the fastest growing cost in our healthcare system is the cost of pharmaceutical drugs. Twenty years ago we spent four times less than we are spending now. It is a huge increase and it is basically about pharmaceutical industry profits. We can get those drugs much more cheaply. I used the example at last night's debate, Lipitor in Canada—an annual supply costs over \$800. In New Zealand, annual supply cost \$15. That's the order of magnitude difference that you can get by bulk buying the drugs.

Policy: Now you are talking about free tuition in higher education. Of course, that is a provincial jurisdiction. How are you going to do that?

Elizabeth May: Yes. Well, we are also talking about creating a new way of making decisions in Canada that doesn't require opening up the Constitution. We call it the Council of Canadian Governments: Federal, provincial, territorial, municipal as well as First Nations, Metis and Inuit. Abolishing tuition by 2020—that's why we need to sit down at the table. What has undermined post-secondary education in Canada were the cuts to kill the deficit

in the early 90s, you know, Paul Martin's effort to get rid of the deficit with the loss of federal/provincial transfer payments downloaded a number of things. Where it has really come to a crisis, and there are many places that it's come to a crisis, but the universities keep jacking up tuition, at the same time classroom size gets bigger. The quality of education is going down. Students can't afford the education they are getting, then they end up with an average of \$25,000 per student debt. Look around the world—the countries that have abolished tuition, you can see that economically it has made sense for them. So it is a question of sitting at the table, working out federal/provincial transfer payments, talking to the university community, to make sure that this works for them.

Policy: Canada is of course a trading nation. We are in the middle of an election and the Trans-Pacific Partnership talks seem to be coming to a conclusion in the middle of this campaign. It would open up a market, a 12-nation partnership of 800 million people and 40 per cent of the world's GDP. For Canada the two hot-button issues seem to be, at least for stakeholders, supply management in dairy and poultry and rules of origin in autos. What are your thoughts on that?

Elizabeth May: There are two other issues I should mention. It'll jack up the price of pharmaceutical drugs,

back to our previous point and since we haven't seen the text, there was at least a Wikileaks text leak that said that Crown corporations would have to be profitable. So there goes the CBC. We absolutely must examine the text. Stephen Harper likes to boast about the number of trade agreements he has gotten us into. The only two MPs by the way, to vote against the Canada-Korea trade deal, were Bruce Hyer and me. The NDP violated their own policy by voting for it but what happened? It's horrible because it undercut our auto sector but the argument was that it will advantage beef exports to Korea. It was only a few weeks later Korea banned Canadian beef. So we've got to study these things and if they include investor state agreements, which Canada-Korea did and which Canada-Jordan did, which the NDP also voted for. If we include more investor state agreements this needs to have a full-on public debate.

Policy: Specifically on supply management.

Elizabeth May: Yes, we are for it.

Policy: Rules of origin in autos?

Elizabeth May: We need to protect our auto sector.

Policy: Finally, on Canada's role in the world. What do you think makes Canada a great country?

Elizabeth May: Canadians. **P**

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