All platforms have climate frailties

EDITORIAL

WITH CLIMATE CHANGE posing as a major issue to be dealt with by Canada's political parties in the run-up to the Oct. 21 federal election, The Globe and Mail devoted two full pages Wednesday to the subject.

Not surprisingly, any reader would come away with the impression that none of the four party platforms examined was picture-perfect. All had frailties of one sort or another.

As for the governing Liberals, the platform is likely to champion the carbon tax and the rebates it will generate to families. Having made some initial moves in its first term in office, the party is also likely to do more than just attack the other parties as having no credible alternatives to the tax. The platform will likely include other measures such as new moves to encourage conservation and subsidies for those willing to purchase electric vehicles.

But a major problem cited in the Globe analysis is that the much-maligned carbon tax, currently $20 a tonne, and other moves to date will fall far short of Canada's commitments under the 2015 Paris Accord on climate change. It quotes UBC professor Kathryn Harrison as citing the existence of missing parts of the Liberals' current program and noting that the hole in question has ?almost doubled? since the program was announced in 2016.

But if that party's program is weak, the analysis suggests that the Conservatives' position is even weaker.

?The Conservative Party approaches climate-change policy with two baselines that separate it from the other parties. It staunchly supports the expansion of the oil and gas sector, and says that it does not believe that policies tackling climate change should impact household pocket books. The policy options left to the Tories then are limited, and several experts have concluded that they will fall far short of Canada's commitment.?

The article quotes Simon Fraser University's Mark Jaccard as saying the Tory plan would actually lead to increased greenhouse gas emissions between 2020 and 2030.

?The Conservatives' plan to cap emissions for large emitters and charge those who blow past these limits is, in effect, a carbon tax, but because there is no explanation of where the cap is or what the tab would be for companies hat break it, Prof. Jaccard said it is impossible to know the effect it will have.?

Neither the New Democrats nor the Green Party get off the hook. Although both parties see the need for a carbon tax, they won't say how high it should eventually be.

As for the NDP, a pledge to end emissions from the building sector, critics have pointed out that building codes are adopted and enforced at the provincial level.

The Green Party's commitment to end all oil imports would seemingly cause significant problems in Quebec and the Maritimes, since there currently is no pipeline to carry Alberta oil to refineries in Montreal and Saint John, N.B.

Now for some of our own observations. One is that all four parties have, at least to some extent, acknowledged the existence of man-made climate change and a resultant need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

That's in sharp contrast to the situation south of the border, where President Donald Trump seems to be a climate-change denier who has done everything conceivable to undo Obama-era curbs on coal-fired power plants and emissions from cars powered by fossil fuels.

Our politicians may also have been influenced by recent opinion polls suggesting that while Canadians generally see a need for action limiting climate change they are not in favour of anything that would increase unemployment or hit them in the pocketbook.

There's also something to be said in support of critics who point out that in recent years by far the greatest increase in emissions has been in China and India, not Canada or the U.S.

In the circumstances, it will be interesting to see both the turnout at Westminster United Church on Oct. 3 and the climate-change arguments that are to be raised there by the six candidates seeking to represent Dufferin-Caledon after the election (if all six turn up).