

How about planting a billion trees?

EDITORIAL

THERE NOW SEEMS little doubt that one issue common to both our federal election next month and the U.S. presidential election next year will be climate change and what to do about it.

The importance of the issue south of the border was illustrated this week when CNN devoted an entire evening by reserving 40 minutes each for 10 Democratic presidential candidates to discuss it

One certainty before the evening began was that none of the 10 would have praise for Republican President Donald Trump, who is effectively a climate-change denier who wants to boost coal production and has eliminated Obama-era limits on coal-fired power plants and automobile emissions.

In Ontario, we've witnessed something similar, with the Ford government having ended a cap and trade program instituted by the Liberals and all the spinoffs designed to encourage conservation and electric cars.

Ironically, the current government has used the successes of the Wynne/McGuinty Grits in curbing greenhouse gases, including an end to the use of coal to produce power and the encouragement of solar and wind power developments as a basis for its campaign against the federal carbon tax.

However, perhaps the best evidence that Ford & Co. really couldn't care less about the threats posed by man-made climate change was its cancellation of plans to plant a million trees this year.

Amidst all the controversy over the massive fires in Brazil's Amazon rainforest, the message that's getting out is that the fires have converted perhaps the world's greatest carbon sink into a device to hasten climate change.

Although we'll admit that adding a million trees to Ontario's forests wouldn't do all that much to curb greenhouse gases, what about a commitment to plant a billion trees in Canada over the next few years?

One need only drive up Airport Road to see an example of the efforts made many years ago to reforest lands that had proven poor farmlands. Back then, the new forests were seen more as a long-range source of wood for a variety of purposes. In that era, climate change had not become an issue and coal was a major source of home heating as well as the fuel used by our railways.

We've no idea how much land would be occupied by our billion trees or just what types of trees would absorb the most carbon dioxide, but we do know a couple of areas where massive tree plantings would make sense.

One would be along our north-south highways, where salt-resistant evergreens should be planted west of the roadways to provide good wind breaks during snowstorms.

Another would be in the thousands of acres of worked-out gravel pits which currently mar the landscapes of Dufferin and Caledon.

As we see it, pit owners should be required to level all the berms that have allowed them to conceal the environmental damage caused by the aggregate industry. Trees for the new forests could be provided by either the government or private nurseries.

Out west, and in Northern Ontario, most of the tree plantings could replace forests lost by massive forest fires. In Alberta, a key area for new forests would be the lands marred by the oil sands industry.

Perhaps the greatest benefit in our proposal is that it should be supported by all our political parties. Even the federal Conservatives,

who along with the right-wing premiers of Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba as well as Doug Ford see fighting the carbon tax as a political winner should see tree-planting as at least a benign option.

If, as seems likely, the Conservatives edge out the Liberals in the Oct. 21 election, it will be interesting to see what, if anything, they would do about climate change.

If it's a minority government (as now seems likely) they may see killing the carbon tax as something akin to British Prime Minister Boris Johnson's determination to allow a no-deal Brexit on Hallowe'en despite this week's Commons vote against permitting such a disastrous option.

After all, the need for carbon pricing is acknowledged by the New Democratic and Green parties as well as the Trudeau Liberals.