

Skid Crease ? The real work begins the morning after the election

?The environment is everything that surrounds us, everything with which we interact, everything that we are; in short, everything.? It is now two weeks since the historic reversal of fortunes in the October federal election. We had high hopes for a Liberal minority government that could work with the NDP and Green Parties to bring environmental sanity back to our country. It appears that nicety will no longer be necessary, but collegial collaboration would still be appreciated.

So that's it. According to our media pundits, the Prime Minister has been deposed, the regime has changed, and all is well in our world. However, history tells us that we are doomed to repeat the mistakes of the past if we neglect to hold to account the promises made by the incoming government. And that takes our continued attention to details and results.

I heard an interesting commentary on CBC Radio the weekend before the election. The young woman being interviewed said: ?The most important day isn't October 19th. The most important day is October 20th. It is easy to vote. But the morning after is when the real work begins. When the people hold to account the government that they have elected to bring about the real changes that they have promised during this campaign.?

This particular morning after brought an unexpected result, a massive Liberal majority government. While that means that our environmental and economic hopes will not need the assistance of the NDP and Green Party to succeed, it does not mean we can let the federal Liberal party rest on the laurels of a well-run campaign.

Typically, on the morning after, we turn over comfortably in our electoral beds and put our faith in the hands of the victors, trusting that they will get on with the job of running the country ethically and as promised. That day, stated the young woman on CBC, and every day for the duration of their tenure, is when the people should be most strongly engaged in dialogue with their government.

That day is when we should demand that the public inquiry into the murdered and missing aboriginal women start, that the national child care program be created, that Bill C-51 be reformed, and that the long-form census be reinstated.

That is the day when meetings with the provincial and territorial leaders are planned to set a collaborative Canadian agenda for the United Nations Climate Change Conference at the end of November.

That is the day when the price per tonne on carbon is negotiated, that the green technologies research and development fund is initiated, and that the investment in urban infrastructure be committed.

That is the day we should see the environmental oversight degradation of the last two Omnibus Bills reversed, our scientists unmuzzled, and our protection of endangered spaces and species strengthened.

That is the day we should see taxes raised on the wealthiest individuals and corporations, and see that money reinvested in a national health and wellness program for the least advantaged among us.

That is the day we should see our role as respectful defenders of Canadian citizens clarified, as responsible global citizens renewed and as international peacemakers reinstated.

I am beginning to believe that it really doesn't matter who the government is if the people sleep in the morning after. The self-fulfilling structure grinds on for those in power and beneficent promises are lost in the hallowed and insular halls of The Hill. If the people are lulled into a sense of false security that change of leaders and parties means change of policies, keep in mind the lyrics of that warning song by The Who: ?Meet the new boss, same as the old boss.?

Unless the basic current structure of governance is transformed, it will be very difficult indeed for any party or leader, no matter how deeply positive change is desired, to make that change happen. The people must demand and support institutional change to break the self-fulfilling prophecy that is the current state of affairs.

We need an Access to Information Act that lifts the veils on government secrecy. We need the data gathered by political party polling to be made public. We need a proportional representation system for voting to be ready for the next election. We need reform for an independent Senate that admits only those capable of wise secondary oversight on Bills passed by the House of Commons.

We need a simpler tax system for the people, a competitive tax system for the corporate world (corporations are not people), a strengthened CPP and reinstatement of the Old Age Security at 65. We need free transit and full health care benefits for seniors. We need interest free loans for university students. We need clean drinking water for every Canadian.

In order to accomplish all this, the people need to remind their elected representatives at every opportunity that they serve us; that we have given them our wish list and hold them accountable for making it come true.

No one is expecting this to be easy in a world of fragile economies and radical unrest. No one is expecting this to be easy in a Parliament that has a Liberal majority in the House and a Conservative majority in the Senate. But we expect to see our elected representatives try their best in an honest and transparent public process of law and governance.

We have put our faith in a promise for real change. Like the song says, ?Pray we don't get fooled again.?

Skid Crease is an accredited member of the Association of Canadian Journalists. He is an award-winning outdoor and environmental educator, a keynote speaker, a storyteller, an author, and a community volunteer. He taught with the North York and Toronto District School boards for 35 years, and officially "retired" from the Faculty of Education, York University, where he was a Course Director and Environmental Science Advisor. Skid has worked with scientists from Environment Canada (pre-2005), NASA, and the Hadley Centre for Climate Prediction and Research in a quest to put an understandable story behind the wealth of their scientific data.