



October 8, 2008

RE: Questionnaire: Public Interest Advocacy Centre, Telecommunications

Attached please find the response of Canada's New Democrats to your 2008 Election questionnaire. It is the policy of our party to respond on behalf of all New Democrat candidates.

To find out more, we encourage you to consult: www.ndp.ca

Thank you for your interest in the views of Canada's New Democrats on the critical issues facing Canadians.

We appreciate your efforts to help voters make an informed decision on voting day.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jack', with a long, sweeping horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Jack Layton
Leader of Canada's New Democrats

Question 1

Is it fair to place on consumers of telecommunications services the responsibility and financial burden of policing and pursuing in the courts and elsewhere anti-competitive, price-gouging, and other unfair practices of telecommunications firms? If not, how does your party intend to reverse the current situation that places this onus on consumers?

Answer

It is not fair for working families to have to take on the burden of fighting price-gouging and other unfair practices. New Democrats believe it should be the role of government to protect consumers from these hurtful practices. For example New Democrats have been fighting the ‘text-messaging cash grab’ by major telecom companies. Cell phone companies want to charge consumers 15 cents for each text message they receive, including spam cell phone companies are gouging consumers, and the Harper government just stood back and watched.

A New Democrat government would take action to prevent such rip-offs. We would ensure that consumers’ concerns are heard by requiring federally regulated agencies such as telephone companies and cable corporations to fund citizen oversight committees to monitor fees, rates and regulatory decisions as part of the formal regulatory and rate-setting process. We would implement “net neutrality” to protect everyday Canadians’ right to freely access the internet content of their choice at a flat rate and with clear and transparent rules. We will end price gouging and “net throttling”, preventing a two-tiered internet. Finally, New Democrats would increase protection to consumers by strengthening the regulatory powers of the CRTC.

Question 2

Will your party support Senator Oliver’s bill if it is re-introduced?

Answer

New Democrats support increased consumer protection and commit in our platform to bringing all consumer-related federal agencies under one roof by naming a Minister specifically responsible for consumer affairs. Senator Oliver’s bill is an interesting and encouraging proposal, and we would give it full consideration should it make it to the House of Commons.

Question 2a

What is your party’s response to recent actions by the CRTC to further deregulate telecom markets? Is the CRTC doing enough to protect the interests of consumers?

Answer

New Democrats are opposed to increasing deregulation of telecom markets and other areas such as food safety inspection. A New Democrat government would protect consumers in sectors where only a handful of companies control the entire industry by strengthening the Competition Act and the regulatory powers of the CRTC, the Competition Bureau and the Financial Consumer Agency of Canada.

Questions 3a & 3b

Does your party stand behind the principle of net neutrality, namely that a telecommunications carrier must not discriminate against or interfere with the traffic traversing its network on the basis of the traffic's nature, content, origin or destination? What specific policy proposals would your party pursue to enforce and protect net neutrality?

What is your party's position on traffic shaping practices of Canadian ISPs? If elected, what actions would your party take in response to these practices?

Answer

A New Democrat government would implement "net neutrality" to protect everyday Canadians' right to freely access the internet content of their choice at a flat rate and with clear and transparent rules. We will end price gouging and "net throttling", preventing a two-tiered internet.