



February 26, 2008

## ***Backgrounder***

# **Polling Alberta's Politicians on Oil Sands**

## ***Results of the Alberta 2008 Election All-Candidate Oil Sands Survey***

Each of the political parties competing to form Alberta's next government has a critical challenge before them: to chart a responsible course for oil sands development. And Albertans have an opportunity to cast their ballot for the party they believe will take action to ensure responsible oil sands development occurs.

Amid the growing urgency about the need to fight global warming, the oil sands have emerged as Canada's fastest growing source of greenhouse gas pollution. Other impacts — drawing down the Athabasca River, creating toxic tailings dumps, and strip-mining and drilling hundreds of square kilometres of boreal forest — are growing just as rapidly. Throughout the province Albertans are facing new hardships resulting from an overheated economy, from a shortage of affordable housing and waiting lists for doctors to crumbling infrastructure and a degraded environment.

From September 2006 through May 2007 the Government of Alberta conducted a province-wide public consultation on how oil sands development should occur, and Albertans wrote and testified in person about their concerns about the pace and impacts of this development, and their vision for the future. Their message was clear: Today's approach — developing fast, rather than developing responsibly — isn't good enough. In response, a multistakeholder committee delivered 122 recommendations to the Government of Alberta — recommendations that are still awaiting government action.

Alberta has an opportunity to show its leadership, entrepreneurship and stewardship, not because of the brute quantity of energy it produces, but on the basis of socially, environmentally and economically responsible development that enhances the quality of life of all Albertans.

The results of this survey provide Albertans with important additional information and perspective to consider when deciding whom to vote for in the election on March 3, 2008. We encourage Albertans to pose these questions to candidates who were unable to or chose not to participate in this survey. We would like to thank each of those candidates who took the time to answer these critical questions and share their perspective with the Albertans they wish to represent in the Alberta Legislature.

## Participation in the All-Candidate Oil Sands Survey

To inform Albertans about their candidates' views on oil sands development, the Pembina Institute commissioned McAllister Opinion Research to conduct an online survey of the candidates in all 83 ridings of the 2008 Alberta election, using questions we had previously asked 500 Albertans in April 2007.<sup>1</sup> This new survey allows the views of candidates to be compared and contrasted with those of Albertans.

Election candidates were contacted via email and telephone between February 15 and February 21, 2008. All results presented as party aggregates in this backgrounder are based on respondents only. They do not include candidates who chose not to answer the survey. Participating candidates responded to five questions developed by Probe Research Inc.

**In total 192 candidates completed the all-candidate oil sands survey:**

**59 NDP — 71% of all 83 NDP candidates.**

**52 Alberta Liberal — 63% of all 82 Liberal candidates.**

**40 Alberta Green — 67% of all 60 Green candidates.<sup>2</sup>**

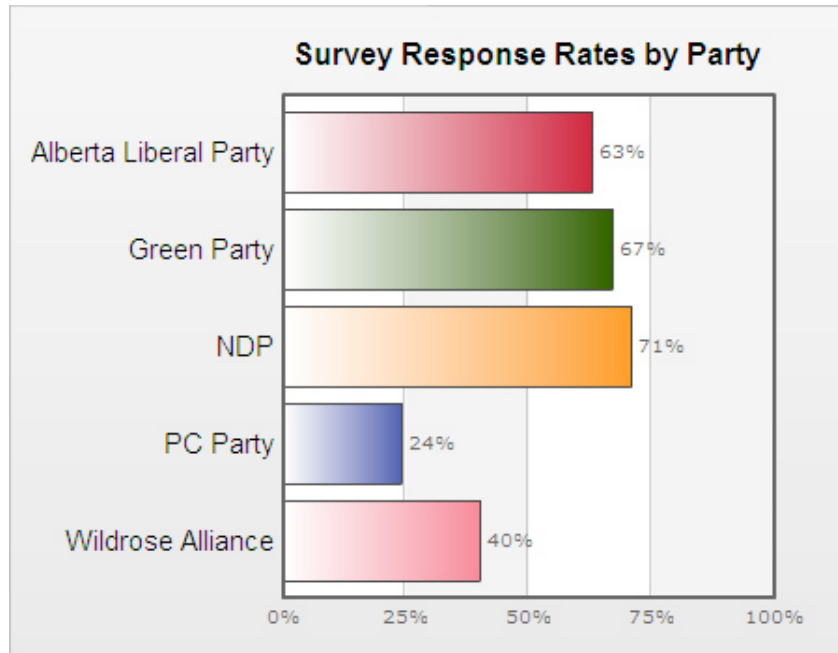
**21 Wildrose Alliance — 40% of all 52 Wildrose Alliance candidates.<sup>3</sup>**

**20 Progressive Conservative — 24% of all 83 Progressive Conservative candidates.**

<sup>1</sup> In April 2007 we polled Albertans on their perspectives on oil sands development. The study was conducted via telephone interviews between April 3 and 16, 2007, of a random and representative sampling of 500 adults from across the province of Alberta. With a sample of 500, it can be concluded with 95% certainty that the results are within plus or minus 4.4 percentage points of what they would have been if all qualifying Albertans had been interviewed. More information about this public opinion survey on oil sands development can be found at <http://www.oilsandswatch.org/pub/1443>.

<sup>2</sup> As of February 15 there were 60 Green candidates identified. As of the close of nominations on February 18 the total number of Green candidates was 79. Party headquarters were contacted to attempt to secure contact information for new candidates, and where possible new candidates were invited to participate.

<sup>3</sup> As of February 15 there were 52 Wildrose Alliance candidates identified. As of the close of nominations on February 18 the total number of Wildrose Alliance candidates was 61. Party headquarters were contacted to attempt to secure contact information for new candidates, and where possible new candidates were invited to participate.



The full responses for each participating candidate can be viewed at <http://www.oilsandswatch.org/survey>, where Albertans can search by a candidate's name, by riding name or by postal code in order to see the responses from each of the candidates in their riding.

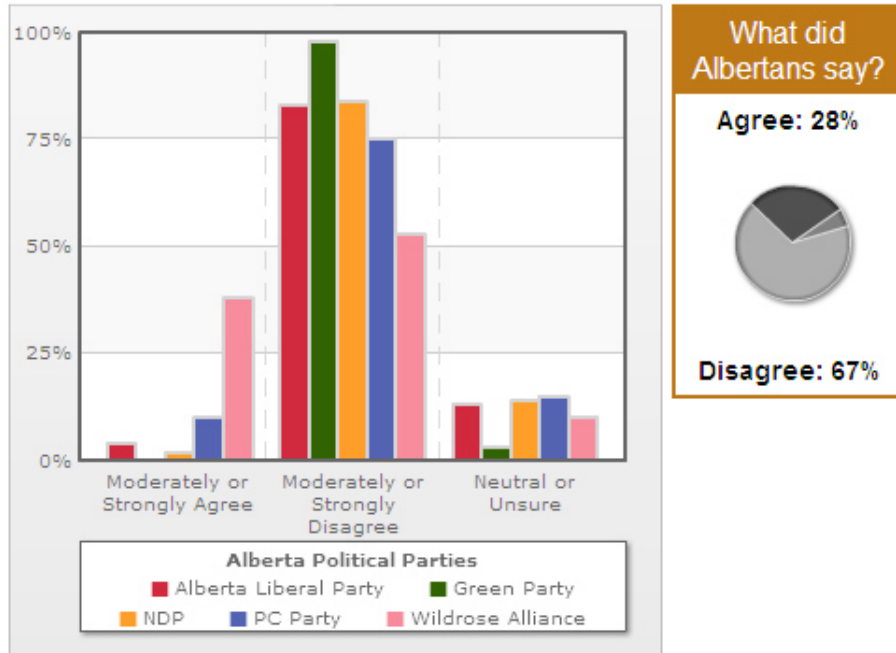
More information on Albertans' views on the oil sands can be found at <http://www.oilsandswatch.org/media-release/1445>.

### Question 1: Pace of Oil Sands Development

Candidates and Albertans were asked:

*Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: The oil sands should be developed as fast as possible.*

Among Albertans, 28% believe that the oil sands should be developed as fast as possible. The percentage of candidates in each party that agreed or disagreed with this statement is presented below:



### Exceeding Expectations for Growth

In 1995, the National Oil Sands Task Force anticipated that production of oil from the oil sands would reach one million barrels a day by 2020. That level of production was achieved in 2004, 16 years ahead of schedule. Environmental rules for the oil sands, by comparison, have lagged, with the multi-stakeholder Cumulative Environmental Management Association delivering on only one-quarter of its mandate during this period of massive oil sands expansion.

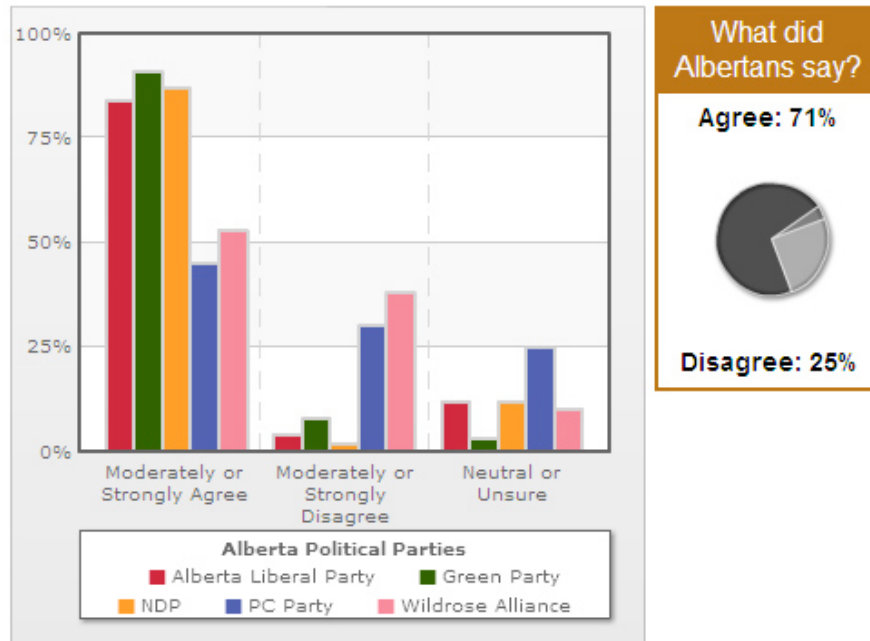
*Source: Dan Woynillowicz, Chris Severson-Baker and Marlo Raynolds, Oil Sands Fever: The Environmental Implications of Canada's Oil Sands Rush (Drayton Valley, AB: The Pembina Institute, 2005), 3.*

## Question 2: A Pause on Oil Sands Approvals?

Candidates and Albertans were asked:

*Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: The Government of Alberta should suspend new oil sands approvals until infrastructure and environmental management issues are addressed in the oil sands region.*

**Among Albertans, 71%** believe that the Government of Alberta should suspend new oil sands project approvals until environmental and infrastructure issues have been resolved. The percentage of candidates in each party that agreed or disagreed with this statement is presented below:



### Catching Up & Getting Ahead

The Pembina Institute has called for a pause on new approvals and sales of oil sands leases to allow for the design and implementation of a responsible oil sands development plan. The Government of Alberta needs to catch up to current oil sands development by addressing the environmental, social and economic impacts of projects that have already been approved and will otherwise exacerbate impacts already being felt. Just as important is getting ahead of any future oil sands development by implementing a plan to proactively manage environmental, social and economic impacts.

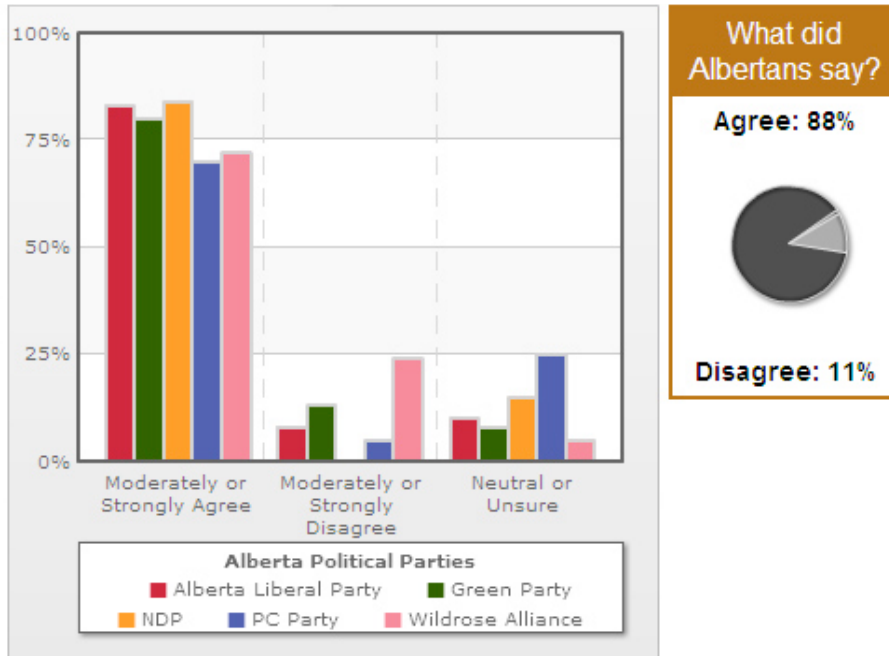
**Pembina’s Blueprint for Responsible Oil Sands Development can be downloaded at <http://www.oilsandswatch.org/pub/1404>.**

### Question 3: Expectations for Oil Sands Mine Reclamation

Candidates and Albertans were asked:

*Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: New oil sands mines should only be approved if companies can demonstrate that they can return mined areas back to the way they were before mining began.*

**Among Albertans, 88%** surveyed either strongly or moderately agreed that new mine approvals should be contingent on oil sands companies being able to demonstrate successful restoration of mined landscapes. The percentage of candidates in each party that agreed or disagreed with this statement is presented below.



#### Reclamation: Fact or Fiction?

Despite 40 years of oil sands mining, not a single hectare of land has been certified as reclaimed after oil sands mining. Many reclamation approaches remain unproven and some habitat types, such as peatlands will be lost forever as a result of oil sands development.

Sources: Government of Alberta, State of the Environment website [http://www.gov.ab.ca/env/soe/land\\_indicators/41\\_status.html](http://www.gov.ab.ca/env/soe/land_indicators/41_status.html) (accessed on February 22, 2008).

Dan Woynillowicz, Chris Severson-Baker and Marlo Reynolds, *Oil Sands Fever: The Environmental Implications of Canada's Oil Sands Rush* (Drayton Valley, AB: The Pembina Institute, 2005), pp. 37–38.

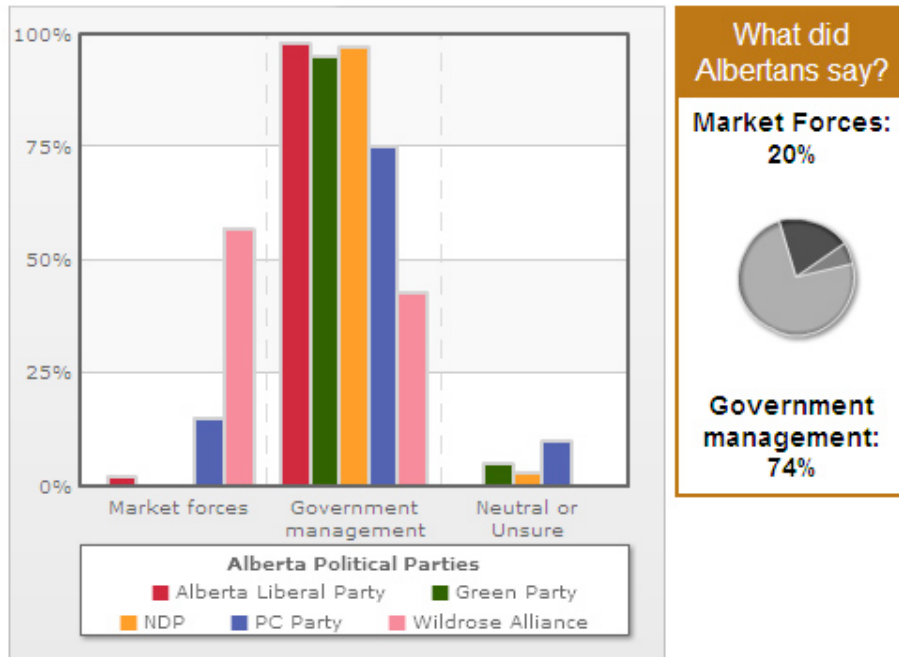
## Question 4: Managing the Pace of Oil Sands Development

Candidates and Albertans were asked:

*Which one of the following two statements most closely describes how you feel about the pace of oil sands development in Alberta (select one answer):*

- A. *Market forces should decide the rate of oil sands development.*
- B. *Government should manage the rate of oil sands development to meet the long term interests of Albertans.*

**Among Albertans, 74%** either strongly or moderately believe the Government of Alberta should play an active role in managing the rate of oil sands development. Only a minority of Albertans believe that it should be up to market forces to decide how fast oil sands should be developed. The percentage of candidates in each party that preferred each statement is presented below.



### Asking Tough Questions

“As for quality of life, just ask someone from Fort McMurray, where 70 of 72 quality of life measures are ‘deficient,’ according to the mayor and city council. Or ask someone in Calgary, where skyrocketing inflation is partly why the price tag for the city’s new south hospital jumped by \$350 million this year.”

*Source:* Dan Woynillowicz, “Wanted: A Balance between Oilsands Growth and Quality of Life,” opinion editorial, *Edmonton Journal*, April 3, 2007, A16.

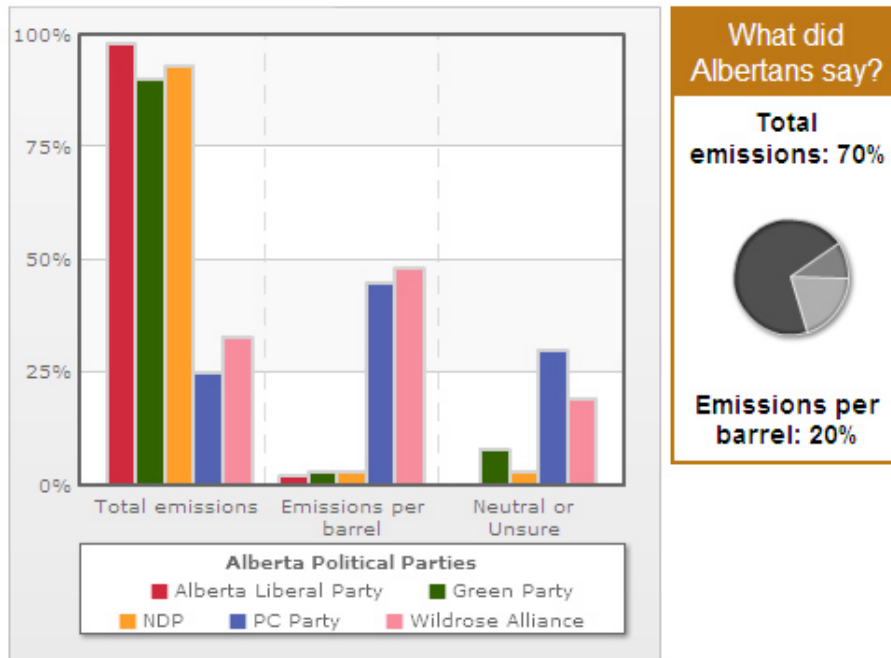
## Question 5: Addressing Oil Sands Greenhouse Gas Pollution

Candidates and Albertans were asked:

*This question compares two ways to set targets for greenhouse gas emissions in the oil sands for the next few years. Do you think that greenhouse gas reduction targets should seek to reduce the ... (select one answer)*

- A. *total amount of greenhouse gas emissions below current levels, even if it costs industry more*
- B. *amount of greenhouse gas emissions per barrel of oil produced, even if total emissions continue to increase.*

**Among Albertans, 70%** support targets that will result in absolute reductions in greenhouse gas emissions in the oil sands, compared to only 20% of Albertans who support an intensity-based approach. The percentage of candidates in each party that preferred each statement is presented below.





## **About the Pembina Institute**

The Pembina Institute creates sustainable energy solutions through research, education, consulting and advocacy. It promotes environmental, social and economic sustainability in the public interest by developing practical solutions for communities, individuals, governments and businesses. The Pembina Institute provides policy research leadership and education on climate change, energy issues, green economics, energy efficiency and conservation, renewable energy and environmental governance. More information about the Pembina Institute is available at [www.pembina.org](http://www.pembina.org) or by contacting [info@pembina.org](mailto:info@pembina.org).