

David Suzuki says the ocean is not a garbage can, he hasn't endorsed Green candidate Galloway

Activist wades into sewage debate, short of backing Green candidate

BY ROB SHAW, TIMES COLONIST NOVEMBER 23, 2012 7:44 AM



David Suzuki speaks at a Green Party rally for candidate Donald Galloway at the Victoria Conference Centre on Monday.

Photograph by: Darren Stone, timescolonist.com

Famed environmentalist David Suzuki says Greater Victoria must stop dumping sewage into the ocean, and he hasn't endorsed the Green party candidate in the riding or the party's position on the sewage issue.

Suzuki clarified his appearance at a Nov. 19 rally of more than 1,300 Green Party of Canada supporters in Victoria this week, saying he was asked by the party to attend. He gave a keynote address about environmental issues.

Many interpreted his presence as an endorsement for candidate Donald Galloway, including, it appears, the candidate himself. A door flyer distributed by the Galloway campaign Thursday read that he is "endorsed by David Suzuki," among others.

But when asked directly whether he endorsed Galloway or the Green party, Suzuki said, "No."

"My position is I'd speak to any group that asked me to speak," he told the Times Colonist in an interview. "If [Prime Minister Stephen] Harper wanted me to speak to the Conservatives, I'd be happy to do that."

Green Party of Canada leader Elizabeth May said she knows that Suzuki, who is a friend, doesn't feel comfortable making endorsements.

However, he appeared to praise Galloway at the event. "Thank you, Donald, for offering yourself for this very, very tough challenge," Suzuki said at the rally.

"The people are here today, I think, to say they appreciate it. They're going to be all out there beating the doors for you as I will be for [Green Party of B.C. candidate] Andrew Weaver when he runs for office next year."

Suzuki also waded into Greater Victoria's contentious sewage-treatment debate.

The issue of the region's \$783-million plan to build a secondary sewage treatment plant in Esquimalt has dominated the byelection.

The only candidate to support the plan has been the NDP's Murray Rankin. Liberal candidate Paul Summerville has called it a "billion-dollar boondoggle." Conservative candidate Dale Gann has said he believes in treatment but that the current plan needs a second look.

Galloway and May have said they support the idea of sewage treatment, but think the proposed facility and system is wrong for the region. May said she thinks she could persuade Suzuki to support the Green position.

Suzuki said it's up to the Green party to explain its position on sewage. He said he doesn't know enough about the specific plan for Greater Victoria to comment on whether it is appropriate.

"My position is you don't use the ocean as a garbage can," Suzuki said. "Even though I know there are scientists at [the University of Victoria] that are saying 'no, no, no, the currents are such that you disperse it,' I just think, as an operating rule, we've got to stop using nature as a toxic dump."

Summerville's Liberal campaign has said Greater Victoria's ocean currents naturally disperse and treat screened sewage.

On that, Suzuki said, he doesn't agree.

"Don't tell me it's all benign, the City of Victoria dumping its sewage into that area," he said. "I'm sorry, but my position is very, very clear: Don't use the ocean as a garbage can, period."

Suzuki stepped down from the board of directors on the David Suzuki Foundation in April, saying he wanted to be able to speak freely without his words being deemed too political for the organization.

The Suzuki foundation supports sewage treatment facilities for Greater Victoria, said John Werring, the foundation's senior science and policy adviser.

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