

Suzuki Foundation in election controversy

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The David Suzuki Foundation overstepped its legal bounds as a charity after its famous founder endorsed Premier Dalton McGuinty's green energy plan in a video, critics have charged.

The video on the Liberal Party website, which showed David Suzuki and McGuinty walking through Vancouver's Star Line, was removed from the Liberal Party website over the weekend following complaints from Wind Concerns Ontario, a citizen group opposed to wind turbines.

In the video, Suzuki praises McGuinty's green initiatives, saying "I happen to applaud the future he's leading us into."

Under Canada Revenue Agency rules, registered charities are forbidden to push a partisan political stance.

Suzuki stepped down from the foundation's board "sometime in the summer months" to "play a leading role" with the foundation's spokesman James Boothroyd, refusing to say exactly when the well known environmentalist stepped down.

But Suzuki and the foundation are "one in the same," insisted Wind Concerns Ontario president John Laforet.

"David Suzuki is the primary spokesperson for the foundation," Laforet said. "This is a charitable foundation. They're not affiliated with the government of Ontario, and now they're turning and supporting Ontario's premier."

Laforet went on to say that the CRA should look "seriously" into Suzuki's political endorsements.

Canadian Taxpayers Federation head Gregory Thomas agreed. Given Suzuki's close ties to the foundation, he said, there is a conflict of interest with his endorsement of McGuinty.

"If David Suzuki wants to be a political activist, that's what he should do, and not call himself a charity," Thomas said.

According to the Canada Revenue Agency website, registered charities "cannot be involved in partisan political activities or attempts to sway public opinion on social issues."

The breaking of such rules could mean reprimands such as mandatory education around CRA regulations, fines or a loss of charity status, said CRA spokesman Philippe Brideau.

But Boothroyd said the foundation didn't break any rules, adding he didn't know why the video was taken down from the Liberal Party website.

"Mr. Suzuki has endorsed our ... green energy plan," said Liberal spokeswoman Alicia Johnson who was unable to recall when she removed the video.

"To ensure that nobody misconstrues Mr. Suzuki's personal comments and (links) them with the foundation, we've removed them from our website."

The David Suzuki Foundation received between \$100,000 and \$250,000 from the government-affiliated Ontario Tripartite in 2010.

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