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Facts, about Global Warming



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We all know that global warming is going to consume us eventually – unless we react quickly enough to reverse the trend. But what is 'quickly enough'? What is the 'right' direction? And, what are the priorities? How do carbon taxes, renewable energy, and commonly tossed-around terms, fit into the picture? Can the facts as we presently know them, answer these questions for the every-day thinking person? Let's try and see what we come up with.

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What are we told?

Public awareness of global warming is attributed to the wake-up call in 1998, that NASA climatologist, James Hansen, delivered to a U.S. senate committee (*MacLean's Magazine, August 2019*). The Paris environmental accord of 2015 set a world-wide target to take steps to reduce harmful emissions that would limit global warming to rise no more than 2.4 (to 3.5) degrees C. Twenty years after Hansen's 'wake-up call', the United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), viewed by many as the reference authority, warned in its report of October 2018 that unless humanity cuts back drastically on burning fossil fuels, the world will change dramatically by 2040. It says that a 2.4-degree allowance is too great; the global heat increase must to be limited to 1.5 degrees C. Its warning is that countries have only 12 years to begin drastic action to avoid a climatic disaster.

Is IPCC Sending a Valid Message?

Facts from scientists seem to support the IPCC message. They inform us that 75% of the world's sea ice has melted into the oceans over the past 40 years, not only heating the oceans but removing a humongous white thermal reflector, so the sun's rays that otherwise would bounce back to the skies are instead trapped in, and further heat, the oceans. (Animal protectors point out that loss of sea ice removes flotation for the polar bears that they use to hunt seals to keep themselves and their cubs alive.) P.E.I.'s shoreline has eroded 28 cm each year for the past 50 years. All of us, via our TV news, have witnessed the upset of climate over the past decade as signaled by increases in forest fires, drought, flooding and storms. If that is not evidence enough, a trip to the far north by anyone will show houses tilting with the loss of permafrost, disappearance of ice bridges and so on. Already effects of global warming are happening sooner than forecast.

Is Global Warming a Health Concern?

Last year 66 people died in Montreal during its heat wave; yet, Montreal at 3 million is among the smallest of the world's large cities (New York is at 20 million). Populations of poor, desperate countries facing 'impossible' heat condition will likely migrate to countries that do not wish to accept them. Canada's Dr. Watt-Cloutier, who views climate change as the greatest health issue of our time, has been campaigning (unsuccessfully, it seems) for meaningful government responses since the mid 90's. In her book, *The Right to be Cold*, Dr. Watt-Cloutier suggests that fighting climate change should be viewed as a human-rights imperative. As the world heats up, more air conditioning will be needed so that energy usage will shift from a predominance of heating in winter to cooling in summer.

What is the Biggest Problem?

Those at the forefront of fighting the global warming battle, say the biggest problem of all has been the inability to develop concern among the general public. They are right because, due to 500 million years of conditioning as an animal, and about 1 million years as a humanoid, we have evolved to react quickly to imminent danger and to be quite lax about distant concerns.

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Two Common Terms

Carbon Tax: A tax on fossil fuels forces industry and individuals to figure out the cheapest ways to burn less fossil fuels or switch to less damaging alternatives. Since the tax is an action towards reducing fossil fuel use, it offers a positive direction. However, it is not very effective because the tax is 1/10 of the \$ size it should be for people to notice it; but it still is better than nothing. Fortunately, regulations on ways to generate electricity have resulted in 3 to 6 times the emission cuts of the carbon tax – and thus suggest a preferable alternative.

Renewable Energy Source: Energy generation by wind, hydro, geo-thermal and solar panels offer alternatives to fossil fuels. However, energy consultants say that in the most optimistic estimate, wind, hydro, geo-thermal and solar-sourced power would only provide 10% of future society's energy needs in Ontario (which weaned itself off of coal about 5 years ago) – and that percentage would be similar in any other jurisdiction. Based on what we know today, only nuclear energy offers a practical alternative quantity (90% nuclear + 10% alternatives) of needed fossil-fuel replacement energy, although political efforts to investigate, or point towards, nuclear are completely absent.

The Government Position

While Canada's government has been strong in some action dealing with the climate-change problem (a leading participant in the Paris accord), it has tabled no long-range plan to address the overall issue and has contrarily advocated fossil-fuel pipelines. One leader has suggested that we are in such an emergency that the government should form a climate cabinet, like a war cabinet to plan serious changes now. At the same time, the government has to be concerned about, and plan for, those who depend on fossil fuels as a primary income source – such as Albertans and Newfoundlanders.

What can I do?

Some say Canada's energy consumption in the world is so small, we can barely make a difference even if Canada abstained totally from fossil-fuel usage. That is like saying: "I will not vote because my single little vote means nothing." The town of Erin Mills near Toronto has made its entire community energy neutral; that is, it produces as much energy as it consumes – the concept of individuals embracing collectivism at work. Could we expand that to other Canadian communities? Guiding an unconcerned Canadian public against impending doom requires serious, altruistic, government leadership now. But the government cannot do it alone. You must help as an individual; you can make choices that reduce your own fossil-fuel consumption: turn off lights you are not using; get a more energy-saving car; put solar panels on your roof, etc.

The real message here is that you, as a business leader, have the means to influence many others.

So, surely, it is up to you to play a responsible role.

Bill

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