

CLIMATE CHANGE ACTION FOR THE MONTH **May 2007**

WHAT TO DO: BC citizens have an opportunity to demonstrate our serious commitment to combating climate change by collectively reducing our energy use on the evening of **Wednesday, May 16**. “Turn It Off! BC” is a new partnership initiative with BC Hydro. This designated “lights out” time is a way we can join global leaders like Paris and Sydney in using designated “lights out” times as a way of bringing attention to citizens’ commitment to reducing energy use. Let’s show the world (and particularly federal Environment Minister John Baird) that British Columbians stand behind our commitment to sustainability—by turning off our lights and other electrical devices on the evening of Wednesday, May 16. *Eat salad or sandwiches or use the barbecue that night. Light the candles! Go for an evening walk. Read a book by candlelight. Go to bed early. Contemplate a cooler planet with habitats for polar bears and penguins, as well as for people in low-lying coastal communities around the world.*

WHO TO WRITE AND WHAT TO ASK FOR: Please contact federal Environment Minister John Baird and ask him to take a stronger position on climate change. Tell him that Canadians are a “can do” people, and want to be a more caring and responsible part of the global community than he has asked us to be. Tell him you want Canada to honour their international commitments and to be a part of the Kyoto Accord. Tell him we should be asked to do everything we can to meet our Kyoto commitments, thus reducing our current levels of consumption of energy and material resources and production of wastes. Tell him he and Prime Minister Stephen Harper have underestimated Canadians’ desire to combat the climate crisis with more serious mitigation measures, and we want to be leaders not followers. Tell him we understand this will have economic and social consequences, and that we are intelligent, creative and flexible enough to come up with good personal choices and effective local, regional and national policies and regulations to deal with the negative impacts and ensure the burden of costs will not fall disproportionately on those with the fewest means. Emphasize we know we have a responsibility, as part of a global community, to do our part to combat climate change.

BACKGROUND: (By Greg Spendjian)

A few days ago Federal Environment Minister John Baird showed the Harper government’s true colours by trumpeting details from an economic report giving reasons why Canada could not undertake to meet its Kyoto Accord commitments. According to Baird this would inevitably lead to a deep recession.

Some environmental groups have countered by arguing that there would not be serious economic consequences to action in this direction. Such denial of economic consequences is not the correct way to answer Baird. Kyoto constitutes only a first tiny step in what will be required in terms of reducing greenhouse gas emissions and mitigating the impacts of global warming. Dealing with the causes of global warming will require the wholesale transformation of societies around the world. Changes will affect every aspect of our existence: what we produce and how we produce it; where and how we live; what food we eat; how we transport ourselves and how much we travel; how we entertain ourselves; to mention but a few aspects. Underlying all will be a requirement for a dramatic reduction of current levels of consumption of energy and material resources and of production of wastes. To take the position that this will not have social and economic consequences strains credibility.

The correct response to Baird is to ask: Given that moving in the required direction will have economic and social consequences, what local, national, and global policies and regulations are needed to ensure that negative impacts are dealt with appropriately and that the burden of cost does not fall disproportionately on those with fewest means?

It is important to ask such questions to challenge current dogma that government policy intervention in the economy is an evil thing that laissez-faire economics is close to godliness, that regulation of any kind is undesirable, and that unrestricted market mechanisms will always provide the answers. In particular need of challenge is the belief that governments should not play any role in the re-distribution of wealth and opportunity to ensure that all members of society have a reasonable standard of living.

The quasi-religious belief in the benefits of economic growth at any cost has to be questioned. This is the crumbling pillar on which the majority of present day socio-economic systems are based, be they capitalist or socialist, democratic or authoritarian. Economic growth is considered a political necessity because it is believed that only by enlarging the size of the economic "pie" can those at the lower and middle echelons of the economy hope to improve their standards of living. It is also believed that only by increasing the size of the pie can modern societies generate the wealth to finance social programs, environmental safeguards, etc.

The consequence of these beliefs is that we have a global economy, which can only be described as grotesque in its overall size relative to the earth's carrying capacity. Nevertheless, huge disparities between countries and within countries remain. While the production and consumption of goods has increased dramatically in the past decades it is difficult to point to an equivalent increase in overall human welfare. And the negative impacts of global warming are not yet fully upon us.

The moment we begin to acknowledge that the biosphere is finite, that unrestricted economic growth based on increased use of materials and energy is undesirable, then the search for real solutions to the serious ecological, social and economic problems we will be facing becomes possible.

The other aspect of the correct answer to John Baird is this: Do not be afraid!!! The transformations, which will be required, will indeed be enormous. But once we let go of our dogmatic illusions, we can be open to the realization that the world we need to create to deal with the challenge of global warming – as a matter of survival - is one, which is even more desirable than the one we have today.

At one point those advocating for reduced arms expenditures used to be have the "no guns - no butter" argument thrown in their faces. Baird's argument sounds suspiciously like: "no global warming - no butter". If this is the best that the Minister for the Environment can do then we are in deep trouble indeed. I believe we can do better!

ADDRESSES: **Honourable John Baird**
 Minister of the Environment
 House of Commons
 Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A6
 Baird.j@parl.gc.ca

If you have time, please send a copy of you letter to all the heads of parties and our own Gary Lunn (Lunn.g@parl.gc.ca).