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Fighting for the carbon tax

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Where to even begin? The past couple of weeks have been yet another whirlwind of rhetoric (both provincially and federally) that appears purely vindictive against institutions that don't conform with the wishes of Scheer and Ford and their respective populisms. Whether it's teachers, economists, or scientists, experts in a given policy field appear to be ?the enemy' to these two parties.

Just this week, our national scientists released a terrifying report. A report that has been years in the making. The report explains that Canada is warming twice as fast as the rest of the planet. The Prairies and the North are being hit the hardest- and as I've written in this space before- the negative economic impacts are staggering. Example: remember when the Atlantic Cod fisheries collapsed? Imagine the entire fishing industry goes under. You see? the oceans are warming too- leading to acidification, algae blooms, and decreased oxygen, which threatens every species of fish. That's what's in our future (think, less than 50 years from now, probably sooner) if we surpass 1.5 degrees of warming. Unfortunately, we are headed for 5+ degrees of warming given our current behaviour. The most terrifying part of the report was the very real prospect of a freshwater shortage across Canada (yet another reason why we should stop for-profit bottling). The consequences in Canada are multi-faceted and terrifying.

Instead of bi-partisan consensus on this national (and global) crisis, on Sunday morning my husband and I both received text messages from Andrew Scheer. The messages told us that we ?better fill up our tanks! gas prices are going up!' and to help him ?fight the carbon tax!' My response was colourful. I hope the robots file it as ?negative feedback.' That being said, at least these anti-evidence/anti-science texts are coming out of conservative party coffers. That's unlike what Doug Ford is doing. He's embarking on a tax-dollar funded provincial advertising campaign to ?fight the carbon tax.? Our MPP Sylvia Jones has written proudly of the work she's doing to ?fight the tax.'

The problem for them is that people aren't buying it anymore. Folks are wide awake and paying attention. Prices at the pumps were already much higher last week than they had been since the fall ($1.09 in Orangeville on Sunday March 31). And that's before the carbon tax was set to hit Ontario. In Nova Scotia, gas prices have remained stable this week despite the tax coming in. Is the government hoping people won't notice their blatant politicking? At the time of writing, prices at the pumps have gone up to $1.14- so if the tax is to blame, then it would only account for 5 cents of the overall increase. But the whole picture is likely a lot more complex than that.

Here are the facts: The PCs cancelled the cap and trade program. It was actually quite lucrative for the province and counted towards a carbon pricing scheme, federally. It brought in billions for the province and funded all kinds of great green programs that average people could benefit from. Indeed, the Financial Accountability Office just released a statement saying the cancellation of Cap and Trade will cost the province over $3 Billion in lost revenue. (Not to mention the millions we are paying to fight the lawsuits for cancelled contracts). No wonder the government is busy trying to increase class sizes. It also stated, after crunching the numbers, that the program would have cost Ontario families less than the federal carbon tax that is kicking in now. They should have left the program in place- they could have restructured the revenue to go towards deficit reduction. The province could have continued to make money, and saved money on lawsuits etc.

I wonder if at some point they'll just feel exhausted having to defend themselves from justified criticism? I don't think they will, because instead of truly addressing the criticisms, they've perfected the art of creating ?stock? responses. Instead of answering the hard questions, the PCs will just recite lines given to them from the central party office. Lines that are devoid of evidence. That has been my experience for years in writing PCs in office. I remember sending a note to our MP David Tilson, a few years ago. It was about the trans-pacific partnership. I was concerned that passing it would weaken our own environmental laws (however meagre in the age of Harper). His staff responded with a bunch of verbiage loosely related to the trade deal- the main thrust of their letter was about copyright law and patents. It had nothing to do with my very specific question about environment.

What is Ford's stock response on climate change? His ?made-in-Ontario' solution! First of all, what is this ?made-in-ontario' label

about? Is the implication that Liberals were foreign agents? Or worse, any viable solution proposed outside of our provincial borders should be ignored? And indeed, this solution is hardly ?made-in-Ontario'? their carbon fund idea came from Australia. Australia is doing next to nothing to address climate change and all of the evidence shows us that a carbon fund rewards polluters and increases emissions.

It doesn't have to be this way. Indeed, I don't think climate denial is something particular to politicians on the right of the political spectrum. There are plenty of conservative minded politicians across the globe who believe pollution pricing is one important piece of the puzzle to solving this crisis. It is the critical first step. Germany's Christian Democratic Union (their conservative party) is taking action on climate change. Germany's economy is one of the strongest in the world, so perhaps it would be wise for our conservative politicians to have a long look at what Angela Merkel and her party have been up to.

But alas, climate change denial is the order of the day and it's deeply damaging to our economy and life on earth. If the idea is to help working folks, let's recognize that we, the working-class, are on the front-lines of climate change. We do pay the most because governments aren't taking this seriously. Workers need good jobs in the technology sector (clean tech is a $26 trillion global industry) rather than planet-killing boom and bust resource extraction. Transitioning to a clean economy kills two birds with one stone: it reduces emissions and creates well-paying, long-lasting employment opportunities. That's the policy direction we need. And we need it now.