

Valuing pollution



April 16, 2019

By Nate Smelle

Emissions of greenhouse gases need to be called out for what they truly are ? pollution. The time for our governmental and corporate institutions to stop pretending that they are an acceptable byproduct of industry and the modern world, is long past due.

A few weeks ago I had the opportunity to sit in on town hall event hosted by MP Mike Bossio that was specifically focused on the ongoing climate crisis threatening humanity and the planet. I commend our Member of Parliament for creating the opportunity to discuss climate change and for spreading the word regarding how humanity is responsible for speeding it up with the community. While it was clear Bossio has a solid understanding of the science behind climate change, I had trouble understanding how he could support the federal government's all talk no action plan to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Most of the moaning on the far right side of the room on this day was directed at the fed's carbon tax. Although I think there are some major loopholes in their plan that allow industry to continue with dirty business as usual, I am actually in support of putting a price on pollution. Sadly, the reality is that when it is free for industries to pollute, they will pollute freely.

Think of it like this ? imagine you were a waterfront property owner on let's say Bay Lake. All of a sudden you find out there is a large industrial operation planning to set up shop less than a kilometre away from your cottage or home. Upon investigating your new neighbour's business plan, you also discover that this operation is going to be spewing diesel fumes, dust and noise into the air and releasing toxic industrial chemicals into the watershed which feeds your spring-fed lake. Before this company starts raking in profits, would it not be fair and wise to take measures ensuring that this business will not be allowed to destroy the local ecosystem providing you a healthy and enjoyable quality of life. If by some chance the benefits of such an industrial operation outweigh the costs to the community, should this company not at the very least cover the full cost of any damage to your property value, and more importantly your health and well-being that they cause?

Of course they should.

We know that the fossil fuel industry is polluting our present quality of life and destroying the planet for future generations in the name of profit. So how could any logical human being argue against making them pay for the full extent of the damage they are doing?

The problem with the Trudeau Liberals' carbon tax is that it allows the fossil fuel industry to jack up prices to make consumers cover their cost of doing business responsibly. The cost should not be tacked onto our bills by the fossil fuel industry when they pull in tens of billions of dollars in profits every year ? especially when our government hands over billions of dollars of taxpayers hard-earned money in subsidies (\$3.3 billion in 2018) on an annual basis to provide these already lucrative companies with corporate

welfare. Furthermore, in 2017 the federal government fell 66 mega-tonnes short of achieving the weak greenhouse gas emission reduction targets it first criticized and then adopted from former prime minister Stephen Harper. Last year we missed these same targets by 79 mega-tonnes

Following Bossio's very informative presentation detailing how severe the impact of climate change has been, and continues to be, he opened up the floor to questions from the audience. Recognizing that meaningful action is needed I managed to get my hand up in time to ask the second question.

When my turn came around I asked him where spending \$4.5 billion of taxpayers money to purchase an old pipeline that disrespectfully crosses Indigenous land, a pipeline that will inevitably increase greenhouse gas emissions and jeopardize the ecological and economic health of Canada's west coast fits into the fed's climate change action plan. Pointing out how there are still more than 100 drinking water advisories in First Nations across Canada, I also asked him if this money not be better spent ensuring that everyone in Canada has access to clean, affordable drinking water.

Acknowledging the complexity of the issue, Bossio asserted that Canada needs the pipeline to get these resources to market so that the economy will grow, and the country can afford to take action on climate change.

With a full room of people waiting to ask their own questions I didn't get a chance to ask my follow up question. What I had hoped to ask him was that if we absolutely need to take this oil out of the ground, considering oil is a finite resource, would it not make more sense to extract the oil as responsibly as possible and boost Canada's reserves to better enable us for the transition away from fossil fuels underway.

I also hoped to draw attention to the fact that profits generated by the fossil fuel industry will not end up in the pockets of most Canadians.

In fact, with extreme weather due to climate change costing Canadians \$1.9 billion last year alone, it is clear that these profits will wind up coming out of our pockets. With Premier Doug Ford pulling an additional \$30 million from our pockets to challenge the carbon tax in court, there will not be much left for us to spend in a province that is now allegedly "Open for Business."