

Axe the facts



By Nate Smelle

DRIVING THROUGH BANCROFT on April Fool's Day, I noticed a small, ragtag gang of protesters standing along the roadside parking lot at Bancroft's Millennium Park carrying signs bearing slogans such as, 'Axe the Tax,' 'Poilievre 2025: Make Canada Great Again?', and another with something about wanting to 'F' Trudeau. Perplexed by the oddity of the assembly and aggressive nature of their signs, I continued on my way, deciding to dig into the reasons for the seemingly spontaneous gathering later that night after I had checked off each of the items on my 'to-do list.' Surprisingly, a couple hours later on my way home from running errands I noticed that a few of the more dedicated demonstrators were still hanging around Millennium Park, so I stopped to say hello and see what the protest was all about. Pulling up beside the group of two women and one man as they stood there drinking coffee in the parking lot, I got out of my vehicle and introduced myself. 'Good day! Looks like I missed the show. I'm Nate from the newspapers in town. What were you protesting?' I asked, pointing to their signs that were now leaning up against the fence. 'Trudeau and his God damn Carbon Tax,' the one woman replied. 'He's a tyrant, just like his father Fidel,' a man in a cowboy hat chimed in. Ignoring the ridiculous accusation directed at our Prime Minister, I questioned their opposition to what many consider to be a necessary measure in addressing the climate crisis: 'So, why are you against the Carbon Tax? Don't you think we need to do something to try and slow global heating?' 'The whole thing is a hoax invented by greedy scientists like David Suzuki to get rich,' he continued. 'Did you know that Trudeau forked over \$18.553-billion in funding to environmentalists last year claiming to fight a crisis that doesn't exist? The real question Canadians should be asking is how much of that money - our tax dollars - ended up in Suzuki's pockets?' 'Jesus! I had no idea. No wonder the cost of our groceries keeps going up,' the other woman added. 'You know what really pisses me off,' said the cowboy, 'the little things. Trudeau likes to say he's for working class people, while he's living the high life on our dime. Maybe if he changed his lifestyle to a working class lifestyle we could get behind him, but I don't see that happening.' 'What do you mean by the high life?' I questioned. 'While us working class folks are struggling to buy gas and groceries, he's living it up in a 19 room, 9,500-square-foot mansion that comes with a private chef and servants. Christ, his home is so big it has two water bills for God sake. Last April his one water bill, our water bill really, was \$4,107. In June, it was another \$7,556. You know who pays for that, the taxpayers. I guess you don't have to worry about being conservative with your water when you're a Liberal and you have your servants paying the bill. Then he has the nerve to tell a woman in Niagara Falls that her \$500,000+ home is a shack! How did we ever elect this guy?' When people start spitting out specific numbers, especially those with a dollar sign in front of them and a decimal point in the middle, I have learned through experience that those numbers likely came from a reliable source. Of course the context of the statistics matters as much as the numbers, however it was clear in the moment that the man in the cowboy hat had done his 'key word' research. Although I didn't learn a thing about carbon pricing and why these protesters were against it, it was obvious that what they were really protesting was what they considered to be Trudeau's taxpayer-funded life of luxury. Realizing that it was now my responsibility to fact check the information they had provided, I thanked my three new amigos for their time and headed home to dig deeper into the stats they were tossing around. Motivated by the

convictions of the three individuals I had spoken with, I opened up my laptop as soon as I got home and started digging. To begin my investigation, I typed the words "Trudeau's 19 room mansion" into my browser. To my surprise, my search did not lead me to Trudeau's residence; instead, with just one click I was knocking on the front door of Stornoway, the official residence of Canada's opposition leader, Pierre Poilievre. Could my new cowboy friend have simply misinterpreted the information that led him, and possibly everyone in attendance, to Millennium Park that day? "Did he just mix up the names?" I puzzled. Revising my search, I typed in the words "Poilievre's 19 room mansion." Immediately a YouTube video entitled, "Pierre Poilievre's 19 Room Mansion ? Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous" appeared on my screen. Clicking the link I noticed the familiar face of one of a handful of politicians in Canada that I fully trust, MP for Timmins-James Bay, Ontario, Charlie Angus. With just three clicks of the mouse, and less than three minutes of my time, I had found most of the answers I was looking for. Providing me insight into the origin of the so called "facts" the protesters had given me through his video, Angus said, "Now Mr. Poilievre already has a house in Ottawa, but by moving into Rockcliffe [One of the most exclusive neighbourhoods in the country] he gets a 19 room mansion, servants, a personal chef, and \$170,000 a year in upkeep for the joint. Talk about gatekeepers, this guy's got groundskeepers. Now personally I don't have a problem with an official residence for the leader of the opposition. But, I do have a problem with Pierre Poilievre telling senior citizens that they don't deserve to have access to free public dental care, while he's being served eggs benedict from his own personal chef, in his own mansion paid for by the taxpayer. Pierre, enough with the champagne and caviar dreams, please." Perplexed by my discovery of the misinformation I had received, I continued with my investigation. Searching the oddly specific number "\$18.553-billion" the man had claimed was Trudeau's gift to environmentalists in 2023, my jaw dropped to the floor when I noticed a report at the top of the screen from Environmental Defense. Debunking the next turd of misinformation I had been given, the first key point identified in the 12-page report entitled, "Canada's Fossil Fuel Subsidies" indicated that in 2023, the Government of Canada provided at least \$18.553-billion in financial support to fossil fuel and petrochemical companies. Now I was faced with a new set of questions. For instance, how many of our tax dollars out of the \$18.553-billion in fossil fuel subsidies went towards paying Suncor Energy's new CEO Richard Kruger's \$36.8-million salary in 2023? If the Carbon Tax adds 3.3 cents per litre to the cost of gas ? approximately an additional \$1.32 to fill a 40 litre tank ? how much does \$18.553-billion in corporate welfare to an industry raking in record profits raise the price of gas, food, etc.? Feeling overwhelmed as I now wondered whether former Cuban leader Fidel Castro really was Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's father, I decided to temporarily abandon my investigation for my own peace of mind. In a time where misinformation and disinformation is spreading as fast as wildfires, now more than ever we need to appreciate the value of having access to accurate information; and, some might say more importantly, to learn how to discern when someone is wasting your time by conveniently and strategically axing the facts.