



By Don Hill

Climate change: one way or the other, the decisions our generation of leaders make will have an impact on the future health of the planet.

"The science is getting worse faster than the politics is getting better," David Milliband, Britain's environment minister recently told *The Guardian* newspaper. He hinted that a proposed international system of 'carbon credits', whereby, countries trade in their greenhouse gas emissions, could be little more than smoke and mirrors.

I don't think this is a time to be silent. Business as usual just won't cut it anymore. As one of my correspondents to this column said, "Perhaps the shame of *not* speaking out is an unexplored aspect of leadership worth looking into."

I agree. So, let me tell it like it is.

There's an elephant in the room. And there is no use trying to hide it. Climate change is real—real in the sense that it is already altering the political landscape of the world. That shouldn't frighten you.

"I live in the faith of Thomas Homer-Dixon's new book that there's an upside to down," said Ruben Nelson, one of Canada's pioneers of 'strategic foresight', the study of probabilities and the future. "I think we do ourselves huge damage when we run away with our fears, rather than stand our ground." We must "encourage each other and get on with what it is that we can actually do about [climate change]."

I believe that once people are galvanized around common cause, what was once thought impossible becomes probable. To my way of thinking, the challenge of climate change is going to be the 'moon shot' of the 21st Century; it is a remarkable opportunity for Albertans.

Before I explain how you—yes, you—can make a difference in an era that will likely require out of the ordinary leadership skills, please consider that nature doesn't negotiate. In the big scheme of things, humanity is pretty small change—hardly worth thinking about. Keep that in mind when telling truth to power.

"I'm not going to tell truth to power. Power never listens to truth anyway," Gwynne Dyer said, in the break after a recent talk he gave at the Banff Centre. The award-winning journalist writes a column that's published in over 100 newspapers around the world. "We are not to blame for our predicament," he groused, when I quizzed him about his take on the climate change debate. "All of this 'we are a

cancer on the planet' ...all of this is repugnant and it's wrong."

Dyer makes a compelling argument that even though human beings have had a hand in disrupting the world's weather, "we can't think there's something uniquely wicked about the way we behave. We are just another life form making our way as best we can," he remarked forcefully, and "there's no point in beating ourselves up about this."

That said, Dyer cautioned we ought not rely on a technology fix to get us through the rough spots that climate change is predicted to deliver in the near future. "We really don't want the job of regulating the planet's weather," he said. "It's a full time task. It will never end. The children will never leave the house."

THE TRUTH ABOUT OIL

In the documentary film, *An Inconvenient Truth*, the petroleum industry comes off as one of the major culprits in the climate crisis. Sure, the oil patch is an easy target. But what if Al Gore is right?

A month after getting his Academy Award for the film,

The global economy runs on oil. That's a fact. No oil: *All fall down go boom.*

So, how does a leader balance business interests, the need for securing energy supply, and the environment?

"When I look at energy and understand the arguments Al Gore makes, the reality is we don't create the demand," said Charlie Fischer, CEO of Nexen Inc., a major player in 'oil sands' development. You've heard this justification before, I bet... and, at the time of my conversation with him, I coyly remarked that the notion of 'we don't create the demand' is also the refuge of the tobacco industry and illicit drug dealers.

"I don't think I'm a drug dealer," Fischer laughed, quick off the draw. "The reality is that people are consuming energy at an ever-increasing rate. And I don't create that demand. It's there. It's implicit."

That's true.

"Oil sands are carbon intensive, but we're working technically to improve that all the time," Fischer affirmed.

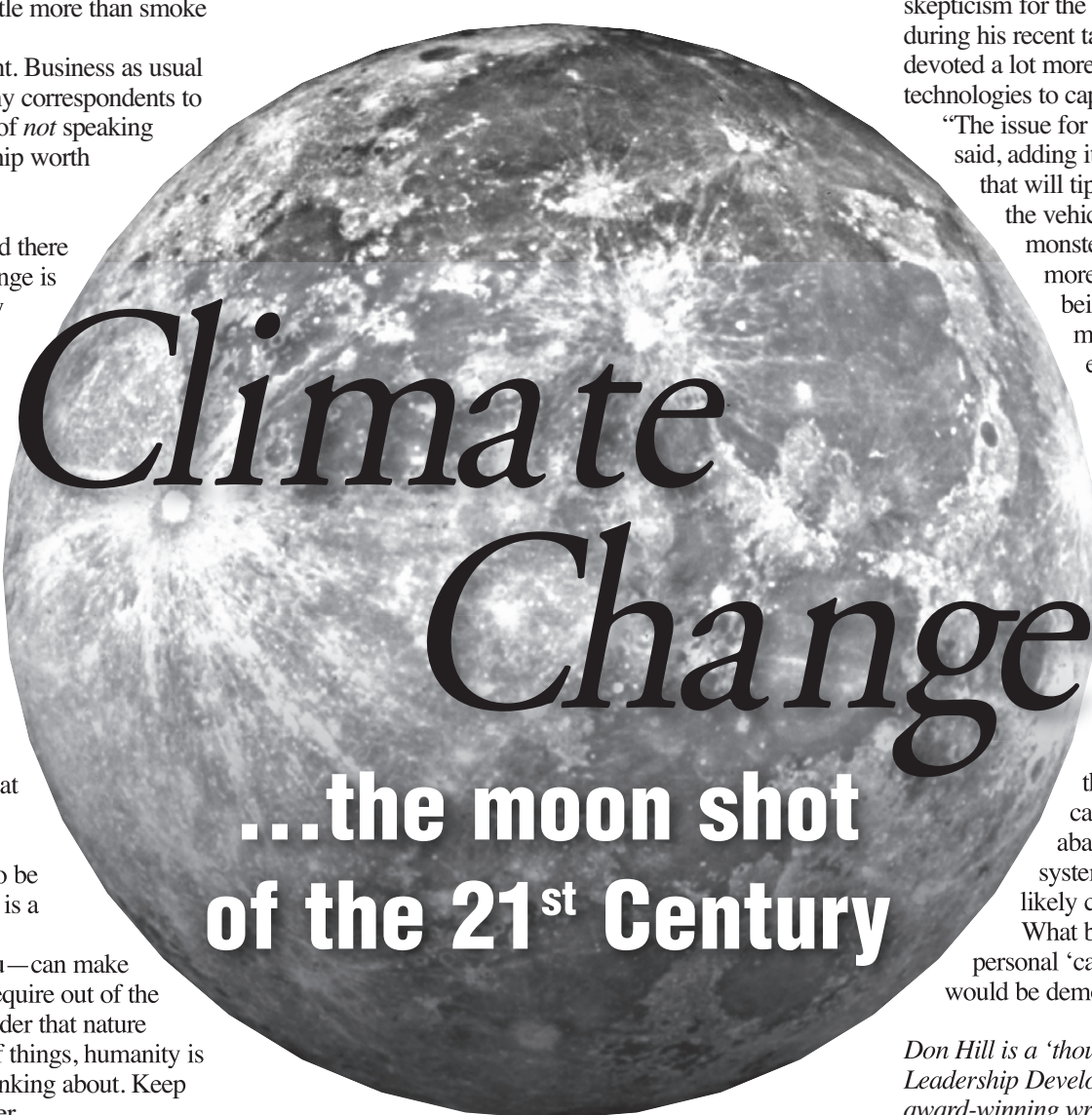
That's also true.

In fact, Gore grudgingly restrained some of his skepticism for the province's oil patch, and he said as much during his recent talk in Calgary. "In Alberta, they have devoted a lot more attention and resources to developing technologies to capture and sequester carbon," he said.

"The issue for me is not just blame industry," Fischer said, adding it's public education not condemnation that will tip the balance. "Why are trucks and SUVs the vehicles of choice? Why are people building monster homes? Why isn't public transportation more of a debate? When we look at decisions being made in our country, we are not making decisions that cause us to be energy efficient."

Things need to get more personal. Britain's environment minister has proposed "a thought experiment of what it would be like to 'spend' carbon, save it and trade it in the same way we do with money". David Milliband's idea is each individual on the planet—you, me and everyone else—would be allotted a quota of 'carbon credits' in accordance with a per capita need for "personal food, household energy and travel emissions." If you use less than your quota, you "would be able to sell to those who spend above." That means you can drive that gas-guzzler with wild abandon if you wish, but under the proposed system of a 'carbon credit' exchange it will likely cost you—bigtime.

What better place than Alberta to first enact a personal 'carbon credit' system? In my view, that would be demonstrating leadership on a global scale. ✓



Climate Change

...the moon shot of the 21st Century

the former vice-president of the United States came to Calgary, and spoke frankly to a sell-out crowd in the Jack Singer Hall. Citing 'tar sands' development in northern Alberta as "the most carbon intensive sources of energy yet produced," he left the room with an impression that the province's oil boom is detrimental to the planet's well-being.

Don Hill is a 'thought leader' at the Leadership Lab and Leadership Development at the Banff Centre. He is also an award-winning writer and broadcaster with a large footprint on the Internet. Listen to his radio series Inspiring Leadership, a 20-part documentary on contemporary leadership and the challenge of leading in the 21st Century every Saturday morning at 8 AM on the CKUA Radio Network.

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