



*If you look at the science that describes what is happening on earth today and aren't pessimistic, you don't have the correct data. If you meet the people in this unnamed movement and aren't optimistic, you haven't got a heart.*  
~ Paul Hawken

spite the conventions and the protocols, declarations, green plans, clean air plans, local action plans; despite elections, and one-tonne challenges, and economic incentives to various ends – despite all this, the climate crisis seems to loom ever larger and more imminent.

Deadly weather events, like Hurricane Katrina and the 2003 European heat wave, are all too familiar now. One of Australia's top climate experts recently wondered if the long-running drought in southeastern Australia should no longer be termed a drought, but instead "the new climate." We used to fear ice-free Arctic summers by 2100, but that due date has been moved up a few times. Not so long ago, it was 2030: just a few months ago, scientists in the US indicated that Arctic waters could be ice-free as soon as 2013.

To avoid a global temperature increase of more than 2°C, (the threshold temperature increase above which many countries have agreed will be disastrous), global GHG emissions must peak by 2015, and must then decline quickly after that.

To put these numbers in perspective, we have seven years until 2015. If all goes well, that's about as long as it takes for a city to develop and execute on a five-year plan. That's not a lot of time. Indeed, it seems, the crisis is getting bigger, and fast.

### A Movement Afoot

Despite the loom of a crisis, I am optimistic. A movement seems afoot – the

beginning of a massive social mobilization that will hopefully generate the transformational changes that are so urgently needed.

Consider this account of last year's US Conference of Mayors' Climate Protection Summit: "*They talk about a campaign as passionate as the civil rights movement, as nationally unifying as World War II patriotism. They're talking put-a-man-on-the-moon-sized investments in the development of clean energy... They're begging the public to pressure national politicians to champion ambitious efforts to curb global warming... This week Seattle is the epicentre for city-led crusades to slow global warming.*"<sup>1</sup>

While this doesn't sound like a normal get-together, this type of meeting is no longer an anomaly.

Across the whole of society, climate change is a top-of-mind issue. It has jumped to the top of policy agendas at all levels. It is a top issue for voters; for business and faith leaders; for economists, scientists, and activists; for the awarders of Nobel Peace prizes. As a global community, we are talking about the climate change challenge in a much bigger way than ever before. We realized, in the last two years or so, something of a global public consensus that climate change is a problem that is both real and urgent.<sup>2</sup> Undoubtedly, this is a good thing.

We are far from a consensus on the solutions, but at least we are starting to explore solutions in a much more thoughtful way, thinking beyond the necessary but insufficient spate of technofixes, and supporting policy and economic conditions that have dominated the debate. Undoubtedly, that, too, is a good thing.

Acclaimed author George Monbiot recently wrote, "The crisis we face demands a profound philosophical discus-

sion, a reappraisal of who we are and what progress means."<sup>3</sup> Indeed, the talk on solutions is widening and deepening. BC Premier Gordon Campbell, in a speech to the Union of BC Municipalities, referred to the fight against climate change as "a war that asks us to change our lives." Canada's Environment Minister John Baird recently spoke to the fundamental importance of cultural change – "that's pretty much the solution right there. Culture change ... (and technology)."<sup>4</sup>

These are promising developments. For it's only through deeper cultural change – changes in our patterns of behaviour and activity, our habits, our beliefs, our technologies, our ways of doing business and politics, changes in the way we live – that we are going to achieve the massive transformation needed to avoid the worst.

### It's Not All Talk

Many critics would rightly point out there is too much talk and not enough action. Of course, that is the case. A massive scale-up of efforts and successes is long past due.

That said, all the talk is starting to pay dividends. The movement has begun. There seems to be a global appetite for action that has started to drive change.

This was evident on the final day of the UN climate negotiations in Bali, in which I was privileged to participate. There were two decision issues still to be negotiated – the United States was the lone hold out on one, and Canada on the other. After each country unambiguously staked their position, they each in turn faced a barrage of opposition from the rest of the world. One by one, other countries expressed their strong preferences, all in contrast to the US and Canadian positions. There was a palpable pressure in the negotiating room that

1 "U.S. mayors meet in Seattle to push for a green revolution," Lisa Stiffler, Seattle PI Nov. 1, 2007.

2 *Climate change: the state of the debate*, Alex Evans and David Steven, October 2007, available at <[www.london-accord.co.uk](http://www.london-accord.co.uk)>.

3 "What is progress?" George Monbiot, available at <[www.monbiot.com](http://www.monbiot.com)>.

4 Speech by the Honourable John Baird, at the Economic Club of Toronto, December 5, 2007.

day. It was real. And, because of it, both the US and Canada joined consensus. The world agreed to a “roadmap” for negotiating a successor to the Kyoto Protocol – again, a small but significant achievement.

Much has been written of late about British Columbia’s goal of reducing GHGs in the province by a third by 2020 (based on current emission levels). It isn’t as strong as some might prefer,<sup>5</sup> but it goes further than most, and may well bring the province’s emissions to 10 percent below 1990 levels, exceeding the Kyoto standard. As part of the plan, the province intends to legislate that all provincial ministries and Crown agencies be carbon-neutral by 2010. In as little as two years, Canada could have its first carbon neutral provincial government. That is promising.

Together with other leading examples from across Canada and around the world, these examples are helping create the conditions for change.

### Too Late for Leadership?

Thinking back to Senator Dallaire’s story, the question begs to be asked. With the climate crisis as it is and only ever seeming to escalate, isn’t it too late for leadership? What do we make, then, of all of the clamouring for leadership on climate change that we hear these days – from our elected officials, from the business community, from scientists, from young people?

The wheels of climate change have been set in motion. We have already experienced some of its devastating impacts, and we can be absolutely certain we will experience more. At the same time, there is a shift in consciousness underway across the whole of society. It is the beginning. We are a long way from having solved anything, but this beginning seems a significant and critical achievement, and the reason for my optimism.

Senator Dallaire’s wisdom rings true. *It takes leadership to prevent a crisis*

*from happening in the first place.* Leadership has gotten us to the beginning. It has come from all around – from the many individuals and organizations that, through their various efforts, are helping stimulate changes in the behaviours, attitudes, values, norms, and beliefs that shape how we live. Thank goodness for their efforts.

But, there is a desperate need for more leadership to take us much further. Climate change is a long, slow crisis. The stakes are high and the time is short. The task – to achieve a transformational cultural change – is a huge one. The journey has begun, but only just. We have a long way to go. *MW*

---

5 The Municipal Leaders’ Declaration on Climate Change adopted a 30 percent reduction target by 2020, based on a 1990 baseline. The BC commitment to 33 percent is based on current levels, which are estimated to be 35 percent higher now than in 1990.

as published in

# Municipal World

CANADA’S MUNICIPAL MAGAZINE – SINCE 1891

1-888-368-6125

[www.municipalworld.com](http://www.municipalworld.com)

Part of the ongoing series of articles  
on climate change coordinated with

 **2degreesC**  
navigating a changing climate

[www.2degreesC.com](http://www.2degreesC.com)