

HEALTHY PLANET HEALTHY PEOPLE "THE EARTH HAS SPOKEN."

On June 28, 2021, the town of Lytton in the interior of North Eastern British Columbia broke the national Canadian temperature record by posting a record high of 46.9C. It was hotter in Lytton than in Las Vegas on that day! For several days prior, all of Northern BC had been under a blistering heat dome and over three hundred forest fires were burning, many of which were out of control.

Days later, ninety percent of the town of Lytton was destroyed by a raging inferno, as a nearby forest fire suddenly surged through this small town of two hundred and fifty people. Within fifteen minutes the entire town was engulfed in towering flames and smoke. There was little or no time to collect belongings. Through a tunnel of fire and smoke, the residents of Lytton ran to their vehicles and fled for their lives. As they fled, heading into an unknown future, a roaring inferno and the fear of death were their immediate companions.

The Earth has clearly spoken through this event in Lytton and through the many environmental disasters reported in the media. Are we listening and are we acting?

The townsfolk of Lytton had to flee with what they could very quickly scoop up as they fought to save their lives. Fortunately and miraculously, only two deaths have been attributed to the fire. This tragic episode speaks graphically of the perilous journey that could lie ahead for our human species as we witness more frequent and more devastating events as the climate crisis gains momentum.

On the afternoon of July 15 the Earth spoke again. This time she sent a message to the residents of Southwestern Ontario. During a severe thunderstorm watch, no fewer than five EF2 tornadoes touched down between Barrie and Traverse Lake in the space of three hours. The greatest damage was in Barrie. In Barrie, ten people were injured and taken to hospital. Eight were discharged after assessment and two were admitted to hospital with serious but non life-threatening injuries. Seventy-one homes were deemed to be unsafe. The estimated cost of the damages is several hundred thousand dollars.

It is now clear to the majority of Canadians that an escalation of adverse climate events speaks and warns of the human and environmental dangers of the changes associated with the climate crisis. When will our political leaders in Canada and throughout the world legislate the necessary changes for human civilisations to survive in a sustainable and equitable manner? When will each one of us do more to prevent the climate catastrophe which now looms over all of us? What more evidence do we need before we act individually, locally, provincially, nationally and globally?

The federal government has failed in its response to the climate crisis. Led by Mr. Trudeau, the federal government bought the Trans Mountain Pipeline (TMX) in 2018 with taxpayers' money for \$5 billion. Recent estimates by 350 Canada now estimate the cost of the pipeline, once

completed, will be well over \$20 billion of public money! Every dollar spent on this pipeline is a dollar that could have been better spent on solutions for the climate crisis and in supporting Canadians through the worst economic crisis, caused by the worst pandemic of our lifetimes. There remains much opposition to the completion of the TMX and there is a significant possibility that it will never be completed.

In Ontario, Mr. Ford led his team of ministers to oppose the carbon tax. Many environmental economists believe that a tax on carbon is the most effective way to reduce the carbon footprint of a province or a nation state. In addition, the Ford government has emasculated the powers of the Conservation Authorities of Ontario to the detriment of the health of the greenspace within their jurisdictions, and beyond into neighbouring watersheds.

Mr. Ford has issued forty three ministerial zoning orders (MZOs) since becoming Premier of Ontario, mainly for private/ for profit developments. Previous provincial governments averaged between zero and three orders per year, usually to facilitate a municipal need such as a school or a library. Investigations by the National Observer uncovered that of the developers on Mr. Ford's list of beneficiaries were significant donors to the Progressive Conservative Party.

Why are MZOs so bad for the future of Ontario's rapidly diminishing greenspace? According to an April 2021 news release by Benjamin Hargreaves of Water Docs, "MZOs allow Municipal and Housing Minister Steve Clark to rezone a piece of land without any environment consultation. Put even more simply, MZOs allow the provisional government to freely decide how land is used in Ontario." Such are the dictatorial, autocratic tactics of Mr. Ford. Developers must marvel at Mr. Ford's generosity toward them. Whilst we, who care about our children's future, shudder at his disrespect for the health of the very ecosystems that we and our children depend.

As already noted, the Ford government has issued forty-three MZOs since coming into power three years ago. For comparison, between 1999 and until Ford assumed power in 2018, previous provincial governments issued on average, between zero or three MZOs per year. This profound increase in the number of MZOs issued under Ford's watch has allowed urban sprawl to spread onto prime agricultural land, wetlands and forested areas at an unprecedented and dangerous rate.

The possibility of a federal election in the near future and a definite Ontario provincial election on June 2, 2022 are golden opportunities for each one of us to promote the primacy of addressing the climate crisis and the wellbeing of the environment. The future health and wellbeing of our human civilisations, threatened by the failed policies of previous provincial and federal governments, should be utmost in our priorities as we prepare to cast our votes. In the next federal election, coming very soon to a ballot box near you, the ballot box question without doubt should be, "THE ENVIRONMENT," on which everything else depends.

Younger and future generations are depending on all of us who are on the voters' list to vote on their behalf. Led by Greta Thunberg, they ask of us to vote for a healthy, equitable and

sustainable future. They eagerly await the outcome of our votes. We simply cannot let them down any longer.

In Canada, the next federal election and the Ontario provincial election in 2022 may well be the last elections for Ontarians to help avoid a permanent, global, climate catastrophe. The Earth has spoken. Will we now speak on behalf of all children, all at-risk species, biodiversity, sustainability and equal equity in the Earth's resources for the common good?

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