

THE VILLAGE GREEN

Number Thirteen, November 27, 2019

PLANNED FRIDAY NOVEMBER 29 CLIMATE STRIKES

The Village Green is aware of two climate strike rallies that will take place in this area on Friday. Owen Sound's Climate Strike takes place from 4:30 to 5:30 pm in front of the Owen Sound City Hall. Its organizers say:

“Act. Bring your voices, your drums, your passion for life as we know it.... This event, organized by Fridays for Future Bruce Grey Owen Sound, expects more than 100 to peacefully demand that local leaders declare a climate emergency, and take urgent climate action in alignment with the best available science.”

Folks in Grey Highlands and environs are invited to a climate strike rally sponsored by the Grey Highlands Climate Action Group, from 3 pm to 5 pm on the 29th at the busy corner of Highway 10 and County Road 4 (Flesherton's main intersection). The nearby Bicycle Café will provide a warm-up spot during the event, but much of the warmth will come from participants themselves.

UPDATE: GREY HIGHLANDS CLIMATE ACTION GROUP: NOVEMBER 28 MEETING

In the last issue of **The Village Green** we mentioned two guests who would attend the Grey Highlands Climate Action Group meeting at **7:00 pm on Thursday November 28** at the Flesherton Library as part of the CAG's self-education and community education process: Nancy Matthews of the Lake Eugenia Association, and Ray Swayze, proprietor of The Bargain Centre in Markdale. We've learned that they will be joined by two additional and knowledgeable guests:

- Stewart Halliday, President of the Grey Highlands Chamber of Commerce and former Warden of Grey County
- Robert Campbell of the National Farmers' Union.

All are welcome to attend on Thursday and to engage in conversation with Nancy, Ray, Stewart and Robert as they give their perspectives on how Grey Highlands can move towards a more sustainable, net zero community.

COUNCILLOR SEEKS SUPPORT FOR NON-PARTISAN ONTARIO CLIMATE COMMITTEE

Grey Highlands Municipal Councillor Danielle Valiquette – former federal Green Party candidate, local climate activist and advocate for concerted multi-party climate action – has introduced a motion to be voted on by the Grey Highlands Municipal Council on December 4, that calls on Grey Highlands to support a motion from MPP Peter Tabuns (Ontario NDP Energy and Climate Change critic) calling on the Ontario government to immediately establish “a *Select Committee on Climate Change [with membership from all parties]... to develop comprehensive provincial strategies and an action plan to address climate-change related threats to our society, environment and economy.*”

In support of her motion, Valiquette cites an early 2018 audit by federal Environment Commissioner Julie Gelfand and auditors general in nine provinces, which said that many Canadian governments have high-level goals to cut emissions, but few have detailed plans to each the goals – plans such as timelines, funding and expected results from specific actions.

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For those wishing to be there to show support when the motion is debated, the Council will meet on December 4 at 1:00 pm in the Municipal Offices in Markdale.

Valiquette is no stranger to non-partisan climate action. She is a member of the Climate Caucus, which supports the Tabuns motion. The Climate Caucus is a non-partisan network of more than 200 councillors, mayors, and regional directors from across Canada, organized in January 2019, who meet bi-weekly on-line to *“work collectively to create policy which aligns with the IPCC targets of holding global warming to 1.5°C”*. After the federal election the Climate Caucus delivered a letter to Prime Minister Trudeau asking him and his government to take a number of climate action steps, including:

- Creating a cross-partisan climate caucus that reports directly to cabinet and advises cabinet on bold, achievable climate action and a just transition for the most vulnerable
- Mapping out a transparent climate action vision that shows how each level of government can help the federal government to meet its 2025 and 2030 climate targets and ensure funding and capacity-building so local governments can act to meet these expectations.

The letter is at

https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5d069b7188b6c900012560b3/t/5db46ffb628b613d4182a503/1572106236542/JT_LETTER.pdf

BLUE MOUNTAINS TO RECYCLE DRYWALL

by Rosemary Gosselin

Three Thornbury residents pleaded the case on November 18th to the Town of Blue Mountains Council for recycling drywall in The Town, and were promised action. Rosemary Gosselin, Barry Tatchell and Pete Russell are members of the Construction Waste Team of a Blue Mountains' citizens' group, the Climate Action Now Network (CANN). As part of their research, they drove throughout Grey County investigating waste management practices in each municipality. Nearly half recycle drywall waste via New West Gypsum Recycling in Oakville.

During his PowerPoint presentation, Pete Russell demonstrated that the Town's current practice in handling drywall waste is unsustainable. New building is burgeoning and *“Half a million pounds of drywall waste is now being generated in the Town,”* he estimated. *“Sulphite from wet gypsum seeps into leachate and is a major risk factor.”*

The CANN team commended Council for declaring a Climate Emergency and noted: *“Diverting drywall from our landfill is one doable, measurable, meaningful and effective strategy.”*

The Committee of the Whole unanimously agreed with Mayor Alar Soever's motion to direct municipal staff to include drywall recycling in the 2020 budget. Council will make its final decision on including drywall recycling in the town's 2020 budget at its December 2 meeting.

The video of the deputation on drywall recycling is at <https://www.thebluemountains.ca/council-calendar.cfm?action=viewdetail&eventid=1091>.

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CONSERVATION AUTHORITIES: PROGRESS BUT NO RESOLUTION YET

In its September 2 edition, **The Village Green** covered a communication from the Ontario Government telling the province's 36 conservation authorities to stick to their core (mandatory) programs. If this were to happen, many educational and outreach programs run by conservation authorities – programs that make the public aware of climate change and mitigation of its effects – would fall by the wayside.

Cathy Little, Chair of the Grey Sauble Conservation Authority and member of the Grey Highlands Municipal Council, tells **The Village Green** that the issue isn't fully resolved yet, but that a flurry of consultations between Ontario's Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks, the conservation authorities and Conservation Ontario (the collective voice of conservation authorities) are leading to progress, including greater awareness on the government's part of the relevance of all conservation authority programs. Consultations have included teleconferences between provincial authorities and each conservation authority. The groundwork has been laid for developing benchmarks for conservation authority programs, and for resolution of the issue of the time it takes for conservation authorities to review and respond to requests from the public for permits and permit exemptions.

In October the Municipal Council of Grey Highlands – a community served by three conservation authorities – took a stand in support of these authorities. After a preamble that lists all the beneficial program types available to Grey Highlands and its residents through conservation authorities, a motion moved by Councillor Little was passed by the Grey Highlands Council on October 2 supporting conservation authority programs:

“Therefore be it resolved that the Municipality of Grey Highlands supports continuation of the programs and services of the three CAs, both mandatory and non-mandatory, and that no programs or services of GSCA, NVCA and SVCA or of other CAs in Ontario be “wound down” at this time; and That the Minister of Environment, Conservation and Parks give clear direction as to what programs and services are considered mandatory and non-mandatory and how those programs will be funded in the future”.

More recently, Collingwood municipal councillor Mariane McLeod introduced a similar motion that she hopes Collingwood Council will pass – a motion to *“fully support the Nottawasaga Valley Conservation Authority's work as providing inclusive outdoor education and recreation, water quality monitoring, preservation of species at risk as well as protecting life and property and acting as a source of expert advice on the environmental impact of land-use planning proposals.”*

Councillor McLeod says conservation authorities are the first line of defense when it comes to climate change. Grey Highlands Councillor Little points out that conservation authorities have boundaries that are watershed-based, not municipality-based, allowing authorities to transcend municipal boundaries and build bridges across municipalities – bridge-building that's at the heart of climate action.

ONTARIO PAYS \$ 231 MILLION TO RIP UP GREEN ENERGY CONTRACTS

The province's public accounts for 2018-19 show spending of \$231 million by the Ministry of Energy on unexplained "other transactions." Research by an NDP staffer has revealed that these "other transactions" were to fulfil a government commitment to wind down renewable

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energy contracts, including the White Pines wind farm in Prince Edward County. Premier Doug Ford had promised that electricity ratepayers would not be on the hook for scrapping this wind farm. In the Legislature's question period on November 26, the NDP accused the Ford government of wasting money on scrapping energy projects just as the Liberal government did earlier in the decade when it cancelled gas-fired power plants in Mississauga and Oakville.

In defending the government's decision to scrap 758 green energy contracts two weeks after taking office, Energy Minister Greg Rickford cited *Climate Change Dispatch*, a blog that denies human-induced climate change. Rickford called it one of his favorite periodicals.

Meanwhile on November 6, in its fall economic statement, the Ontario government announced it will examine the province's economy, environment, infrastructure and communities, to assess in which areas the province is most vulnerable to climate change. Said Jeff Yurek, Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks:

"Our government is taking action in the global fight to reduce emissions and strengthen our resilience to the impacts of climate change that are already happening in our communities, such as more frequent extreme weather events and flooding. This impact assessment will help the province, municipalities, Indigenous communities and other local partners make more informed and timely decisions to keep communities and people healthy and safe."

In response to this announcement Dianne Saxe, Ontario's former environmental commissioner, said she was glad the government would do the assessment, but she added:

"We do not need another report to know that Ontario badly needs to dramatically reduce our fossil fuel emissions, starting immediately, and that many actions of this government are increasing future damage and reducing our options."

The Ford government continues to oppose the federal government's carbon tax and has said it will take its challenge to the Supreme Court.

A TOO-WARM AUTUMN IN OUR ARCTIC

Climate scientists have demonstrated that climate change is warming the Arctic at a rate much above of the rate elsewhere. This shows itself in more frequent and intense periods of above-normal temperatures. This autumn has been an example.

Inuvik in the Northwest Territories faced above normal temperatures every day between September 1 and November 11 In Nunavut, Pond Inlet in Nunavut had only one day of below normal, one day that was 11 degrees warmer than average. Above-normal days occurred 80% of the time in the communities of Cambridge Bay and Pangnirtung in Nunavut. The Canadian Forces Station at Alert, on Ellesmere Island, broke a record for September 6 this year by six degrees. The U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration says that sea ice in October was at its lowest extent since records began in 1979 (32% below the 1981-2010 average).

CANADA'S TRANS MOUNTAIN PIPELINE SUCKS UP MORE TAXPAYER \$\$

A report, *Trans Mountain Pipeline Financials Suggest Taxpayer Dollars at Risk*, released on November 19 by the Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis (IEEFA), shows an additional us\$320 million in new government subsidies were given in the first six months of this

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year to finance the construction of the already highly-subsidized multi-billion dollar Trans Mountain Pipeline Expansion Project (TMX) which would run from Edmonton to Burnaby B.C., calling into question the economic feasibility of the expansion project. The subsidies covered operational deficits and the costs of financing a us\$5 billion investment made by the Canadian government to buy the Trans Mountain Pipeline from Kinder Morgan in 2018. The report is at https://ieefa.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Trans-Mountain-Pipeline-Financials-Suggest-Taxpayer-Dollars-at-Risk_November-2019.pdf.

A Trans Mountain Pipeline has run from Alberta to the B.C. coast since 1953. The proposed new TMX pipeline would run roughly parallel to the existing pipeline.

The report also shows that substantially more subsidies will be required to complete the project, while the amount of subsidies is not clearly identified in Canadian government's financial disclosures. Said IEEFA's director of finance and report co-author Tom Sanzillo, *"Our research shows that the economic case for building the Trans Mountain pipeline is weaker than ever. The Federal Government of Canada has still not provided an accounting of the project's true costs, which is a great failing to Canadian taxpayers, who are paying for the pipeline."*

The newly elected Liberal government recently promised us\$500 million in revenues from TMX to fund green projects. However, the report clearly shows that the Trans Mountain Corporation, the company that runs the existing pipeline and is developing its expansion, had operating losses of us\$69 million for the first six months of 2019 and will continue to require ongoing subsidies for as long as the Canadian government owns the business. Said Sanzillo,

"The pipeline project was questionable from the start... and the Canadian government has no experience running a profitable oil and gas concern. If Kinder Morgan, the original owner, couldn't make a go of it, why would Canada's government be able to do any better?"

FRACKING LOSES HERE AND THERE

Fracking continues to lose traction across the world.

In early November the U.K. government announced a formal, immediate moratorium on fracking. Drilling companies have targeted several UK sites for years, but a series of earthquakes have recently stalled operations, and local opposition movements have blocked drilling sites and pressured lawmakers across the country. Prime Minister Boris Johnson had been a vocal proponent of drilling, and his Conservative Party was the only major political party that still supported fracking. However, the public backlash against fracking changed the party's mind. At the time of the announcement, fracking had stopped in the U.K. anyway. Permits to frack included restrictions. Companies had to keep within a certain threshold such as water contamination and seismic activity and they were unable to keep the seismic activity low enough given multiple attempts, so fracking had stopped.

On November 4 the State of Florida's Senate Environmental and Natural Resources Committee unanimously endorsed fracking ban legislation. Given widespread public support for the ban, the proposed legislation will likely be approved by the state legislature.

On November 11 Pennsylvania's Department of Health announced it will undertake a US\$3 million study to determine whether fracking damages public health, and specifically whether a spike of a rare childhood cancer, Ewing sarcoma, throughout southwestern Pennsylvania is related to the chemical processes and waste products associated with fracking.

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California recently placed a temporary moratorium on new fracking permits until scientists complete an independent review of the practice. The action also included a temporary prohibition on new permits for steam-injected oil drilling, in the wake of an oil spill at a Chevron-operated site in Kern County that leaked 1.3 million gallons of oil and water. Governor Gavin Newsom linked the actions to a shift away from oil in general. *“These are necessary steps to strengthen oversight of oil and gas extraction as we phase out our dependence on fossil fuels and focus on clean energy sources. This transition cannot happen overnight; it must advance in a deliberate way to protect people, our environment, and our economy.”*

Meanwhile, recent data show fracking is unprofitable at present. A briefing note and report released on November 19 by the Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis (IEEFA) stated that IEEFA analysts found that a cross-section of 38 publicly-traded North American oil and gas companies collectively spent \$1.3 billion more on new capital projects during the quarter than they gained from selling their product. *“Ours is a conservative estimate since we have excluded companies that have merged or declared bankruptcy or had other major changes during the quarter,”* said IEEFA energy finance analyst and report co-author Clark Williams-Derry. *“Fracking remains a losing proposition for investors.”*

BUT BRITISH COLUMBIA CODDLES FRACKERS

Established in 2003, the deep well credit program was intended to underwrite some of the costs that fossil fuel companies incurred for drilling deep and later horizontal wells.

For more than two years, the B.C. government has fought efforts to compel the release of information on the hundreds of millions of dollars in subsidies it doles out to fossil fuel companies each year. It has refused to release documents or it has handed over worthless information with dollar figures and company names blanked out. Now, after successive appeals to the Office of Freedom of information and Privacy by the BC office of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA), the public has details on the extent of subsidies.

The new information the government was compelled to release shows that in fiscal year 2018, a total of 26 fossil fuel companies earned a combined \$703 million in credits. Two in every three credits that year went to just five companies. Companies drilling and fracking for natural gas in northeast B.C. were bankrolled by B.C. to the tune of \$703 million last year, a 45% increase over the previous year when companies received more than \$485 million in credits.

The public still doesn't know how much in royalties Encana, Petronas and others pay annually. The CCPA has requested the information: the finance ministry won't release it.

REPORT: CARBON TAX WORKS, BUT MUST BE HIGHER

A report from The Ecofiscal Commission, a privately-funded policy group that supports market-friendly solutions to climate change, says that Canada needs a carbon price of \$210 per tonne of greenhouse gas emission by 2030 to meet its Paris targets, if it relies on the carbon tax alone. That carbon price would lead a 40-cent per litre rise in prices at the pump ten years from now. The federal carbon tax in place in four provinces and soon to be imposed in Alberta (which doesn't have a provincial equivalent of the federal carbon tax) is set to increase to \$50 a tonne by 2022 – nowhere near the level proposed by The Ecofiscal Commission

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The Ecofiscal Commission report says that the carbon tax is the most cost-effective approach to fighting climate change even though it's politically unpopular.

The report comes on the heels of a dismal report from the World Meteorological Organization saying that levels of heat-trapping greenhouse gases in the atmosphere have reached another new record high, despite commitments from nations to rein in greenhouse gases. Analysis of carbon isotopes in the atmosphere show that the increase in gases like carbon dioxide came from the burning of fossil fuels. Said WMO Secretary-General Petteri Taalas:

"There is no sign of a slowdown, let alone a decline, in greenhouse gases concentration in the atmosphere despite all the commitments under the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. We need to translate the commitments into action and increase the level of ambition for the sake of the future welfare of the mankind. It is worth recalling that the last time the Earth experienced a comparable concentration of CO₂ was 3-5 million years ago. Back then, the temperature was 2-3°C warmer, sea level was 10-20 meters higher than now."

CLIMATE PROTESTERS TAKE THE FIELD AT HARVARD-YALE FOOTBALL GAME

Students and alumni from Harvard and Yale disrupted the annual football game between the two universities on November 23, occupying Yale's field in New Haven Connecticut at half-time and demanding the colleges divest from investment in fossil fuels. More than 200 protesters stalled the game for an hour, many chanting: "Hey Hey! Ho Ho! Fossil fuels have got to go!" The protest was briefly booed by some in a crowd of 44,989 and discussed widely on social media.

Harvard reports only about 3% of its investments to the Security and Exchange Commission, but a 2016 analysis of the 3% shows that Harvard has invested in at least nineteen companies in the fracking sector, including us\$2 million in Range Resources, a company responsible for over 200 legal violations in Pennsylvania alone. A 2015 report by the Natural Resources Defense Council lists three other companies Harvard has invested in – Anadarko, Pioneer, and WPX – as top violators of fracking laws. Says Harvard Ph. D. student Benjamin A. Franta, who researched Harvard's fossil fuel investments:

"For climate... education is important. We know about the climate-related research Harvard supports through its facilities and staff. But it is also important to know about Harvard's own role in polluting activities. Our investigation of Harvard's investments in fossil fuels, including fracking, provides a small window into those activities. There are hundreds of millions of dollars in fossil fuels we can see and potentially billions remain hidden."

WALKING LIGHTLY AND TOGETHER ON THE EARTH MAKES US HAPPIER: STUDY

The results of a study entitled ***Happier with less? Members of European environmental grassroots initiatives reconcile lower carbon footprints with higher life satisfaction and income increases***, published in *Energy Research & Social Science*, presents evidence that belonging to sustainability-oriented grass roots initiatives leads to a reduction in individual carbon footprints – and people who belong to these groups seem on average happier than people who are not members of such groups. The study was carried out through the Norwegian University of Science and Technology.

The study compared the carbon footprints of 141 members of community-based sustainability projects like food co-ops and eco-villages in Germany, Italy, Romania, and Spain in the domains of food, clothing, housing and transport, and compared the results to similar data collected from

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1,000 people living in the same places but not involved with climate projects. It then compared the two groups by testing the influence of socio-economic variables that are typically associated with both footprint and well-being.

Results showed that grassroots initiative members have 16% lower total carbon footprint, and 43% and 86% lower carbon footprints for food and clothing respectively, compared to their “non-member” counterparts. It showed no significant differences in the carbon footprints of housing and transport. Increases in income are not associated with increases in the total carbon footprints of members, while the influence of income is confirmed for the carbon footprint of the total sample. Instead, factors such as age, household size and gender better explain the variation in the domain-specific carbon footprints of initiative members. Finally, members show higher life satisfaction compared to non-members and are 11% to 13% more likely to evaluate their life positively.

But...is it possible that happier people are more likely to join grassroots groups in the first place? In either case, the results help dispel the myth that climate group members are unhappy prudes trying to displace their unhappiness by preaching to others.

NOBEL-WINNING ECONOMIST SAYS IT'S TIME TO KILL THE GDP

Nobel-winning economist Joseph Stiglitz would like gross domestic product (GDP) to be eliminated as a measurement tool. Gross domestic product is defined as the total value of goods produced and services provided in a country during one year.

Says Stiglitz:

“The world is facing three existential crises: a climate crisis, an inequality crisis and a crisis in democracy, yet the accepted ways by which we measure economic performance give absolutely no hint that we might be facing a problem. If growth is not sustainable because we are destroying the environment and using up scarce natural resources our statistics should warn us, it is clear that something is fundamentally wrong with the way we assess economic and social performance. If we measure the wrong thing, we will do the wrong thing.”

The problem, he says, is that politicians see positive GDP figures and continue with the status quo. GDP gives no hint of environmental degradation or resource depletion, nor inequality, middle-class suffering, or lower standards of living. GDP tends to correlate with consumption, which in turn is commonly used as a proxy for welfare. In other words, the more people consume, the happier they are supposed to be. The problem is not with GDP itself: it wasn't designed to reflect social or environmental wellbeing. But false assumptions flowing from it (such as the assumption that it's a proxy for all forms of wellbeing) make it a dangerous measure in world where what we make, and how we make it, can kill us.

Stiglitz' new book *Measuring What Counts: The Global Movement for Well-Being*, co-written with French economists Jean-Paul Fitoussi and Martine Durand, is a blueprint for how countries can use more appropriate metrics that account for details such as sustainability and how people feel about their lives. Stiglitz cites examples of issues hidden by over-reliance on GDP stats:

“Had the US, for example, focused more on health, rather than just on GDP, the decline in life expectancy among those without a college education, and especially among those in America's deindustrialised regions, would have been apparent years ago. Likewise, metrics of equality of opportunity have only recently exposed the hypocrisy of the US's claim to be a land of opportunity: yes, anyone can get ahead, so long as they are born of rich white

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parents. The data reveals the US is riddled with so-called inequality traps and those born at the bottom are likely to remain there. If we are to eliminate these, we first have to know that they exist, and then ascertain what creates and sustains them."

Stiglitz *et al* are not the first to discover the limitations of GDP or to suggest alternatives. The document at http://www.consultmcgregor.com/documents/resources/GDP_and_GPI.pdf describes five alternatives to GDP as the pre-eminent measurement tool:

1. The Fordham Index of Social Health (FISH)
2. The Genuine Progress Indicator (GPI)
3. The United Nations Human Development Index (UNHDI)
4. The Gross Sustainable Development Product (GSDP)
5. The Gross Environmental Sustainable Development Index (GESDI).

MORE U.S. COAL-FIRED ELECTRICITY PLANTS CLOSE

Two more U.S. coal plants closed in early November, the latest in a series of shutdowns as coal has a harder time competing with natural gas and cheap renewables. These two closures are equal to the emissions reductions from all U.S. coal plant shutdowns during the entirety of 2015.

The Bruce Mansfield unit in Pennsylvania and Navajo Generating Station in Arizona were two of the biggest on the grid. The 2.25-gigawatt Navajo Generating Station emitted around 20 metric tons of CO₂ annually, equivalent to 3.3 million cars. After two years of unsuccessfully trying to find a buyer, it's one of the largest carbon emitters to ever shut down in U.S. history.

The Bruce Mansfield unit, Pennsylvania's largest coal power plant, was producing 2.7 gigawatts of electricity annually, and emitted 123 metric tons of CO₂ between 2007 and 2017, before shutting down last week, two years ahead of schedule.

Coal-generated energy use has been declining in the U.S. since 2000.

FOOD & WATER WATCH: "TAKE THE PLEDGE"

The U.S. non-profit Food and Water Watch took an interesting approach to spreading the word about climate action. It asked folks to make an online pledge to discuss climate change during Thanksgiving gatherings this year. Said its Executive Director, Wenonah Hauter:

"Climate change can be an intimidating topic to bring up, but the more we talk about it, the more we shift public opinion and knowledge. Together, we can increase the urgency around saving our climate, food and water simply by starting a conversation with the people who matter the most to us."

This is the pledge:

**"Stopping climate silence is going to take all of us!
I pledge to talk with family and friends about climate change."**

In return for signing the pledge, Food and Water Watch sends signers (along with a donation pitch) a guide to raising climate change at family events, based on three key tips:

- Find a lighthearted way to ease into the conversation.
- Be willing to show that climate change makes you feel vulnerable.
- Remember that you don't have to change anyone's mind in one conversation.

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The guide is at <https://www.foodandwaterwatch.org/news/3-easygoing-tips-bring-climate-crisis-your-big-family-dinner> .

NEW YORK CITY SAYS ELECTRIC CARS ARE CHEAPEST OPTION FOR ITS FLEET

Electric cars are expensive. The sticker price for electric vehicles (EVs) has historically exceeded that for comparable gasoline cars, but that's less true every month. Cars like Kia's electric Soul, GM's Bolt, and Tesla's Model 3 have pushed the price of high quality EVs below the median price for cars in the U.S., even before thousands of dollars in state and federal incentives.

The total cost of ownership can be far cheaper for all-electrics, which is of particular interest to fleet owners, including municipal governments. While average car buyers look at the sticker price, fleet owners focus on lifetime costs (maintenance, fuel and ancillaries). By this calculation, EVs now appear to be cheaper. A 2019 study of five European Union countries found a VW Golf owner would save anywhere between 5% (UK) to 27% (Norway) driving an EV version of the vehicle versus a diesel. But the most savings are to be had by fleet owners.

On March 8, New York City released the public its analysis of fuel and maintenance costs for 1,893 of its 9,196 light-passenger vehicles in 2018. It found servicing costs with all-electric vehicle models were less than for gas, hybrid, and hybrid plug-in models. Added to an affordable sticker price, these data bolster the argument for EVs.

POPE AND CONSERVATIVE CATHOLICS ARE ON DIFFERENT CLIMATE PAGES

Last Friday, at the 20th World Congress of the International Association of Penal Law, Pope Francis waded into the climate change debate again with an unusual idea: perhaps environmental destruction should be classified as an official sin.

During his speech, Francis said he was thinking about adding "*ecological sin against the common home*" to the catechism, the book that summarizes Catholic belief. "*It is a sin against future generations and is manifested in the acts and habits of pollution and destruction of the harmony of the environment,*" he said. Some theology experts think the pope's interest in the environment is a reflection of his social justice beliefs, since climate change hurts the poor and marginalized first and worst across the world – people who have the least capacity to adapt or to recover from disasters.

The pope's efforts to integrate environmental stewardship into the Catholic faith haven't always convinced Catholics. A survey conducted a year after he published his climate-themed encyclical *Laudato Si* found that his call to action backfired among conservative Americans. Right-leaning Americans were less worried about rising temperatures after hearing his message. Only 22% of Americans who had even heard of the encyclical expressed concern over climate change. The Pope actually lost some credibility with conservative Catholics.

TRUMP-BACKING AUTOMAKERS ARE CASTIGATED BY SCIENTISTS

A group of American scientists has mounted a petition to protest carmakers (including Toyota, Fiat Chrysler and General Motors) who've sided with President Trump in his fight with California over emission standards. California, backed by 13 other states, wants to impose stringent

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emission standards on cars sold in that state. Trump denies the state's authority to set its own standards and supports lower standards at the national level.

Says the Union of Concerned Scientists, singling out Toyota above all:

“Auto manufacturers just turned their back on science. The hypocrisy is astounding. After decades of trying to create an image of themselves as a green automaker – thanks to the popular Prius, one of the first mainstream gasoline-electric hybrids for sale in the United States – it’s appalling to see Toyota working against strong clean car standards... This must not go unchallenged—it is up to American consumers to fight back against this corporate negligence. Urge the automakers to reverse course and support California’s right to set and other states’ right to adopt strong vehicle emission standards. We’re joining more than half a dozen other organizations, including environmental, consumer protection, and labor groups, to get as many people as possible to sign our petition. Act now to tell these auto manufacturers to stop putting short-term gains ahead of the public and the climate in their support of the Trump administration’s attack on clean car standards.”

In response to Trump’s position, the State of California has imposed a boycott of purchase by the state government of vehicles made by the car companies that back Trump.

Said former California Governor Jerry Brown, in a tweet responding to Trump:

“Thank you @realDonaldTrump for making crystal clear how little you know about the global car market. Your horse and buggy strategy will not work. The fossil fuel car is going the way of the dodo bird. Please inform the other members of the Flat Earth Society.”

This summer another group of automakers – Ford, Volkswagen, Honda and BMW – reached a voluntary deal with California to set tougher emissions and fuel economy rules for themselves than what the White House was trying to implement.

GOOD-CRUD-OF-THE-MONTH CLUB: PLASTICS

In an article in the December 2019 edition of Scientific American entitled *Learning to Love Plastic*, author Wade Roush challenges us to re-think our attitude to plastic. Says Rauch:

“Biodegradable’ plastic doesn’t do what you think it does. Your paper or metal straw takes only a tiny sip at the problem of plastic pollution. And your supposedly eco-conscious cloth grocery bag is more damaging to the environment than conventional plastic bags unless you reuse it literally thousands of times. Many of our ideas about plastic and the environment are confused. And that may be getting in the way of the fight against global warming.”

Rauch makes the point that biodegradable plastics and other biodegradable consumer material adds to the greenhouse gas burden because they release these gasses, particularly CO₂ and methane, when they decompose. Says Rauch:

“Even worse, if biodegradable plastic ends up in an oxygen-deprived landfill rather than a composting facility, anaerobic decomposition will turn it into methane, a gas that warms the planet from 34 to 86 times as much as CO₂. And if you dump biodegradables into the ocean, they break up into tiny bits that choke marine animals long before they degrade appreciably. If we’re going to extract carbon from the ground at all, far better that it ends up in a soda bottle that will last 400 years than in the combustion chamber of your car. If we want to save Earth, we should stop obsessing over biodegradability and invest in bio-based plastics.”

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Non-biodegradable plastic, because of its extended lifespan before decomposing, locks up carbon, keeping it out of the atmosphere. But in arguing for plastics as a way to lock up CO₂, Rauch acknowledges that too much of it gets into terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems

Rauch points out that non-biodegradable but plant-based plastic does exist, citing polyethylene terephthalate (PET), which Coca-Cola uses in its Plant Bottle. The current version uses PET that is 30% plant-based. Both Coca-Cola and Pepsi have announced bottles made from 100% plant-derived PET, but neither has a version ready for market yet.

If the world fully converted to non-biodegradable bioplastics starting in 2020, says Rauch, the carbon sequestered over the next 30 years could amount to more than 10 gigatons.

What Rauch doesn't discuss in his article is the likely effect on agriculture, and on agriculturally-caused climate and other environmentally negative effects, if plants are grown on a widespread basis to produce plastics.

(Thanks to climate activist Rob Smith of Collingwood for drawing our attention to this article.)

IN MY HUMBLE OPINION: "YES, BUT..."

At the Regional Environmental Meeting held on October 22, I spoke briefly with Pete Russell, a thoughtful and amiable man from Blue Mountains who has done extensive research on drywall recycling, and who (with two colleagues) seems to have convinced the Town of Blue Mountains to embrace drywall recycling.

During our conversation Pete voiced his highly informed support for drywall recycling, but said he hoped that recycling this building material would not become a pretext for continuing to build houses far larger than necessary in an increasingly ecologically sensitive society.

I was struck by the fact that Pete's thinking had gone beyond the virtues of a green initiative, to also identify what might be one of the downsides of a good thing.

This is what we sometimes do – but should always do – in trying to think our way out of the mess we're in, as the prelude to acting our way out of the mess. We need to continually say "**Yes, but...**" We should always try to identify and take into account the unintended consequences of green ideas.

If there's a lesson to be learned from the technological history of the last century, it's that we have created an imperiled world not because of the main purposes of the technological choices we've made, but because of the unintended (but in many cases predictable) consequences of those choices. We need to be humble and realistic enough to remember that even the best-seeming green initiative may have negative consequences ranging from the merely inconvenient to the manifestly catastrophic. If we don't think of these consequences we can't protect ourselves from them.

Being sure we think through all the consequences of green action need not descend into the two enemies of action – analysis paralysis and error terror. Ultimately we need to decide what to do, and we usually need to need to do it in the absence of complete knowledge of all consequences. But saying we can't do it perfectly is no excuse for not doing it better.

THE VILLAGE GREEN

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I'm reminded of an interesting traditional practice in the Roman Catholic Church when someone has been proposed for beatification and canonization (the steps in declaring someone to be holy or a saint). Evidence must be presented to justify the claim of holiness or sainthood. As part of evaluating the evidence, the Church appoints two opposing canon lawyers – an **Advocatus Dei** (Advocate of God) who presents the case for sainthood, and an **Advocatus Diaboli** (Devil's Advocate) who tries to pick holes in the case put forward by God's Advocate.

As we proceed towards a greener world, our ethical, scientific and political establishments need Advocates of God and Devil's Advocates debating the merits and demerits of actions under consideration. But in each of our brains we also need the equivalents of these two advocates – two inner analytical voices that together propel us not just toward action, but toward wise action.

I think both these opposing and coalescing voices live together rather well in Pete Russell's brain. Blue Mountains is the better for it.

Respectfully submitted to the *Polis*,
John Butler

ROKOVOKO: A FRUITFUL WARNING

***“Queequeg was a native of Rokovoko, an island far away to the West and South.
It is not down in any map; true places never are.”***

Herman Melville, *Moby Dick*, 1851

Our correspondent from the Potentate of Rokovoko recently attended the annual meeting of the Rokovokan Academy of Arts, Science and Whalebone Scrimshaw, held in the back room of Tim Hortons in Rokovokoburgh. The key topic of discussion was a sticky subject – the negative effects of Rokovoko's guava plantations, whose fruits make up 97% of Rokovoko's GDP.

Statistics gathered after this year's guava harvest show that the level of guava dioxide (GO₂) in Rokovoko's atmosphere now stands at an alarming 752 parts per million, an 87% increase over the nation's pre-guava level. *“Atmospheric guava dioxide accounts for the increasing tendency of Rokovokans to take three-hour sweet-dream siestas just about every day”* said Rokovokan Prime Minister Queequeg IV shortly after his nap last Thursday afternoon.

Rokovoko's largest investment firm, MuuMuu's Money Shack And Live Bait Emporium, has responded to the island nation's environmental crisis by diversifying its investment portfolio. It has imposed a moratorium on future guava investments, sinking its money instead in Canada's XML Pipeline. *“My friend Justin Trudeau tells me it's a helluva good investment”* said Rokovokan PM Queequeg IV while munching on a guava fritter.

FACTS THAT HELP YOU TO CHANGE THE WORLD

The average amount of greenhouse-gas emissions per capita among G20 countries is 7.5 tonnes. Canada's emissions per capita are at 18.9 tonnes.

source: Climate Transparency.

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Prime Minister Trudeau has promised that the federal government will reduce greenhouse gas emissions to 30% below 2005 levels by 2030 and that the government aims to exceed that goal. But an Environment and Climate Change Canada report in December 2018 tracking Canada's progress projected that even when one takes into account environmental policies that aren't yet active, Canada's total emissions by 2030 are only on track to be 19% below 2005 levels.

sources: CTV News and Environment and Climate Change Canada

SHE SAID / HE SAID

“Mainstream economists nowadays might not be particularly good at predicting financial crashes, facilitating general prosperity, or coming up with models for preventing climate change, but when it comes to establishing themselves in positions of intellectual authority, unaffected by such failings, their success is unparalleled. One would have to look at the history of religions to find anything like it.”

David Graeber, *Against Economics*. New York Review of Books, Dec. 5, 2019 Issue

“Many Canada Pension Plan investments are in the biggest companies working in the Alberta oil sands, which produces high-cost, carbon-intensive bitumen. The Alberta energy industry is working to convince investors that its oil and gas is produced sustainably as it scrambles to deal with an estimated \$30 billion divested in the last three years, including Sweden's central bank, which has said it will no longer invest in projects with large climate footprints.”

Judith Lavoie,
Canada Pension Plan investments rely on oil and gas companies overshooting climate targets, new report reveals
The Narwhal, Nov 19, 2019

autumn is leaving
tugging each others' branches
two pine trees

Masaoka Shiki (1867-1902)

For information about *The Village Green*, contact John Butler at 519 923-6335 or agora@xplornet.com