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A Time of Consequences

“The era of procrastination, of half-measures, of soothing and baffling expedients, of delays, is coming to its close. In its place we are entering a period of consequences” - Sir Winston Churchill, November 12, 1936.

This prophetic statement was made more than seventy years ago preceding World War II, about the gathering storm of Nazi Germany. Today we have a much different gathering storm facing the planet in the form of global warming and climate change. Some time ago we entered a period of consequences, where again, the time for procrastination and half-measures has come to a close.

Pointed words I know, but after spending a weekend in Montreal with former Vice-President Al Gore, David Suzuki, and nearly 300 Canadians who came together to learn more about the increasing challenges of the global climate crisis, one can't help but think of it in these stark terms. New information and science about the accelerating impacts of global climate change make it clear that decisive action is required now.

As individuals, decisive action can be at the household level, by making decisions to drive a more fuel-efficient car, to drive less, use less energy, produce less waste, and support environmentally friendly businesses. Or it can be at a higher level, by demanding your elected officials make environment a top priority – by taxing polluters, capping emissions, regulating fossil fuel-generated activity in our province and country.

Businesses can act decisively by determining how to reduce energy use in buildings, operational processes and transportation. They can implement policies for anti-idling, turning off computers, equipment and lights, reducing paper use, and favouring local purchasing in the supply chain for products and services.

Federal and provincial governments, who continue to do little on this issue, must act decisively by implementing sustainable energy alternatives, and providing incentives to reduce reliance on fossil fuel-generated energy. Governments can provide supports for citizens to build energy efficient homes and drive fuel-efficient cars; and provide incentives for businesses to switch from high greenhouse gas generating processes to more carbon neutral operations.

In Montreal, we came away inspired, and I admit a little fearful, about the pressing need to deliver the climate change message and urge Canadians to take decisive action at any level where they are able to affect change. Together our voice must get stronger and stronger until it cannot be ignored. In that spirit, we issued a declaration to serve as a call to action to Canada:

“We are 275 volunteers, of diverse backgrounds and ages, and representing all Canadian provinces and territories, who were trained by Nobel Laureate the Honourable Al Gore to deliver his Academy Award-winning climate change presentation ‘An Inconvenient Truth’ - to raise awareness and to inspire action on this planetary emergency.

Today, with one voice, we urge all Canadians - and especially all Canadian politicians - to make climate change the highest priority. We urge individuals to inform yourselves and to take the actions necessary in your homes, businesses and communities to reduce your environmental impact. We call on all elected officials to immediately advance the policy changes that will once again make Canada a world leader - to create a country, an economy and a global community that is sustainable for future generations.”

Al Gore says with conviction and clarity that we have indeed entered a period of consequences: “This is a moral moment. This is not ultimately about any scientific debate or political dialogue. Ultimately it is about who we are as human beings. It is about our capacity to transcend our own limitations.”

It’s the time of consequences. It’s the time to act.

Sonya Hull is project manager for Fredericton’s Green Matters campaign (www.greenmattersfredericton.com); and is now part of The Climate Project – Canada’s group of presenters. The Climate Project-Canada is an affiliate of the The Climate Project (Worldwide), a network of volunteers trained to educate public audiences on the challenges of and solutions to the issue of climate change. For more information, or to book a trainer, go to: www.ClimateProjectCanada.org