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Thinking Globally

The Green Matters column typically focuses on practical ways we can reduce our environmental footprint – from saving energy, to reducing waste and conserving water. And while these personal and local decisions are crucial in the battle against climate change; decisive global action from world leaders is an absolute critical element if the crisis is to be averted. So in that spirit, this column is different - it focuses on the big picture and our global commitment. And it's also different because I have a writing partner.

As I write, a young Frederictonian now living in Montreal, Nicolas Nadeau, is on a train from Montreal to Toronto and then boarding a plane to Poznan, Poland. Nick is emailing me his thoughts as he prepares for his journey to the United Nations Climate Change Conference (www.unfccc.int). Nick and two other Frederictonians, Taryn McKenzie-Mohr and Caroline Lee, are part of the Canadian Youth Delegation, a group of 26 young leaders from across Canada attending this pivotal conference, that Nick says “has the potential to change the future of our climate and lives”.

These youth are incredible examples of ‘think globally, act locally’. They are now living across the country – in Fredericton, Montreal and Vancouver – and they are all involved in the battle against climate change at the local level; in their schools, workplaces, and communities. But from December 1-12 they will truly be thinking globally, as they sit with world leaders to voice their collective opinion on climate change.

The Youth Delegation is part of an ambitious agenda intended to advance the shared vision for a new climate change regime, including strengthening member countries commitment to the process and the timeline for reducing climate change causing greenhouse gas emissions (GHGs). Their role and that of other Canadian leaders attending the conference is crucial at this time, given that Canada is one of the countries that is the furthest from its GHG emissions reduction target.

Over a decade ago, most countries in the world joined an international treaty - the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) - to begin to consider what can be done to reduce global warming and to cope with whatever temperature increases are inevitable. Following that, a number of nations approved an addition to the treaty: the Kyoto Protocol, which has more powerful (and legally binding) measures. The major feature is that it sets binding targets for 37 industrialized countries and the European community for reducing GHG emissions by an amount averaging five per cent against 1990 levels over the period 2008-2012. The Kyoto Protocol was adopted in Kyoto, Japan, in December 1997 and entered into force in February 2005. The Kyoto Phase I period expires in 2012, and the Poland conference this week will set the scene for what is to follow in terms of climate change commitment and action on a global scale.

Nick believes with great conviction that individual and collective pressure and involvement matter. And he gave me evidence from last year's UN Climate Change Conference in Bali that shows how individuals are stepping up to demand action from their governments:

“Things were wrapping up on the second Friday of the two-week event. The Canadian Youth Delegation had decided to go out for supper to celebrate their hard work, and then we received a phone call. Canada was blocking final negotiations (they did not want the scientifically agreed upon targets from the International Panel on Climate Change to guide the post-2012 negotiations). We rushed to the conference centre, it was late at this point - around 11pm. It would be a long night! Through a barrage of phone calls and emails to Canada (where it was still daytime), we encouraged Canadians to call the Prime Minister's Office, and leave a message stating that these actions to block final negotiations were not representing them as Canadian citizens concerned about the environment and climate change. The PMO was flooded with calls, and the signal rang busy for hours on end. Canadians had spoken, and when the government found itself publicly isolated in its opposition, it finally accepted the terms.

So just like concerned citizens back home in Canada made a difference last year in Bali, citizens in Fredericton can continue to ask policy and decision makers for concrete actions on environmental protection and climate change. We can't let this slip, it is simply too important.”

Godspeed Nick, Taryn and Caroline. And thank you.

Sonya Hull is project manager for Fredericton's Green Matters greenhouse gas reduction campaign. Find out what you can do to 'act locally' at www.greenmattersfredericton.ca. Or take part in the Global Day of Action on Climate Change hosted by the Conservation Council of New Brunswick on Sunday, December 7th at 1pm in Officer's Square.