

Statement by Councillor Bill Evans at Sackville Town Council meeting, April 8, 2019

On Friday, March 15th (the Ides of March), I heard a lot of passionate and informed speeches and I was presented with a statement from a bunch of young Sackville citizens pointing out that all of us who share this planet are facing a climate crisis which, if left unchecked, will be catastrophic, especially for the poorest and most vulnerable among us. The science is in. This is no longer debatable. And, it's not good enough to simply no longer deny the reality of climate change. As so many of these young people pointed out, the time for waiting, the time for arguing, the time for deliberating, the time for hoping is long past. The collective "we" have blown it and, as a result of this inaction, it's already too late to do it right. That's why it's a crisis now. And crisis requires dramatic action.

As I see it, there are several schools of thought on the climate crisis: first, we have the people who recognize the urgency of the crisis whose awareness and engagement compel them to demand an appropriate collective response from government leaders. Then there are those members of the public who are more-or-less aware of the problem yet, manifesting a form of cognitive dissonance, continue to behave more-or-less as before. There are also those in power who are currently doing what is almost certainly too little and possibly too late. But sadly, there is another group who, for reasons I cannot fathom, deny the urgency of the crisis and argue against virtually any form of effective action by appealing to our selfishness, laziness and myopia. More sadly still, some of the members of this group lead provincial governments in Canada (including our own) and the federal government south of the border. The struggle and our ultimate success depend on whether members of the first group can inform and inspire the second group and can work together to overcome the resistance of the fourth group to pressure and support the third group in our collective efforts to deal with the climate crisis.

Now I happened to believe that, if we are to preserve life on this planet as we currently know it without too much further damage, the national and provincial governments are going to mobilize huge resources and work in concert with other national governments. If that doesn't happen, then I think that we're doomed and we have already seen that, left to their own devices, governments are not doing enough, fast enough. I think it's disgraceful that our provincial government is taking our federal government to court in an effort to undo efforts to curb greenhouse gas emissions. What we need to do, as individuals and as municipal governments, is lobby these other levels of government to act responsibly, to encourage others to lobby, do what we can to mitigate the causes as well as the effects of this climate crisis and to accept individual short-term costs for the sake of collective long-term benefits. It's going to require a lot of hard work and sacrifice if we are to succeed but, as those young people said: "This is our future. We must succeed".

As I became more and more aware of the Climate Crisis, I also became more aware that people had been telling us for decades about climate change when it was still a threat - before it had reached the crisis stage. This news isn't new but, sadly for us, it has taken too long to sink in. As Al Gore famously put it: it's An Inconvenient Truth. People really don't want to have to believe it.

As the deputy mayor stated that Friday in March, the Town has not done nothing. We have already done many things, both symbolic and effective, to address this crisis, but we can and must do more. These young people demanded that we recognize that we face a Climate Crisis and we need to make appropriate climate action a priority in Sackville. I believe that we're doing this tonight. If our provincial & federal leaders won't do the right thing because it's the right thing to do, then we will show them by our example and we will pressure them with our lobbying, our marches and our strikes and our votes.

I keep thinking about what my young granddaughter might ask me years from now: Would she say: "Let me get this straight... You knew what was happening. You saw it happening. Why didn't you do something about it?" I don't want to be like those sea-faring people on Easter Island, who depended on the wood from their trees for their survival yet, at some point, they cut down the last tree, dooming themselves and their children. I don't want to be party to doing the equivalent of that on a global scale. I want to be on the right side of history. I want to be saying to my granddaughter that we did all that we could and, though it may have got pretty bad, before it was too late, we were able to turn things around. I don't want to have to hang my head as the temperatures and sea levels rise inexorably and increasingly frequent and intense flooding and drought and storms displace millions and chaos reigns and have to say to my sweet girl: "Well... we just kept on doing what we'd been doing because we liked living that way and it was easier... and, well... we're sorry we ruined your world".

Continuing to do the same thing and expecting a different outcome is what some would call insanity. Let's not be crazy. Let's recognize the seriousness of this crisis, the necessity of action and... do what needs doing to save our home. As those young people warned us: There is no Planet 'B'.