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King and the Climate Action Statement

By Skid Crease

I have to make both an apology and a confession. In my last column on the Climate Summit of the Americas, I neglected to include Philippe Coulliard, Premiere of Quebec, as one of the primary movers of the historic Climate Action Statement.

My confession is that on July 9, 2015, I signed the Climate Action Statement on behalf of all of the citizens of King and Caledon. Al Gore made me do it.

Mayors Pellegrini and Thompson and our councilors shouldn't be too worried. The Climate Action Statement, presented at the Climate Summit of the Americas in Toronto recently, was also signed by 21 states, provinces, regions, and municipalities, so Caledon and King won't be going this alone.

Premier Kathleen Wynne and Minister of the Environment and Climate Change, Glen Murray, along with Quebec Premier Phillipe Coulliard, Governor Jerry Brown of California, Governor Peter Shumlin of Vermont, and past President of Mexico, Felipe Calderon all pushed this challenge forward to address the impacts of accelerating climate change.

From the Climate Action Statement: ?This challenge requires all Nations, states, regions, cities, businesss, indigenous peoples, and civil society to play a role, bringing their respective strengths and capabilities to bear on the transition to a cleaner, more resilient future.?

It was strongly endorsed by former Vice-President, Al Gore, who addressed the delegates just before the signing ceremony. He asked the audience three questions: ?Must we change? Can we change? Will we change?? The answer to the first two questions was a resounding YES. But the answer to the last question depends on whether we have the moral courage to change.

So, with no one else from our regions in the room, I answered, ?Yes, we will change!? And as we change we can lift the local and global economy, and the quality of existence for all living things on Earth.

Here's what we are committed to do:

1. Set ambitious greenhouse gas (GHG) reduction targets.
2. Join the Compact of Mayors and publicly report on reductions and demonstrate continued progress.
3. Commit to the Under 2 Memorandum of Understanding (MOU limiting the increase in global temperatures to below 2ºC) across sectors such as energy, transportation, and building and appliance efficiency).
4. Support carbon pricing linked to investment for renewable energy innovation.

How do King and Caledon address this? First, we look to the success stories close to home. Our little home on the south hill of Bolton runs on Bullfrog Power, with a lifetime metal shingle roof, super insulated attic, energy efficient windows and doors, insulated garage door, the most energy efficient appliances available at the time of purchase, LED lighting, solar assisted water heating, and native plants/no pesticide landscaping. We also drive a hybrid vehicle. Other than that, we're pretty normal.

When we can afford it our next steps will be a closed-loop on demand solar/gas water heater, a heat recovery ventilator for efficient fresh air exchange, a grey water recovery loop for toilet flushing, and solar panels to reduce our draw on the grid. Innovation and incentives have now brought these technologies into viable economic consideration. And the resale value for an energy efficient home is priceless.

Now, imagine if our municipalities ran on Bullfrog Power, insisted that every new development, industrial and residential met minimum Gold LEED standards, supported hydrogen and electric fueling infrastructure, and encouraged solar, wind, and micro hydro energy development.

Imagine if we developed pedestrian friendly walking and biking routes throughout all urban areas, permanently preserved and linked all watersheds and greenbelts, and protected prime agricultural lands from rapacious developers. Community development is all about choices ? let's make the right ones.

Nearby, the Town of Guelph has enacted its Sustainable City Strategy. Further west, Mayor Gregor Robertson (recently invited by Pope Francis to a two-day conference on climate change at the Vatican) and lawyer David R. Boyd co-chair ?Vancouver 2020: A Bright Green Future.? This initiative was conceived by their Greenest City Action Team in collaboration with residents, First Nations, business leaders, academics, non-governmental organizations, and city employees in a process of participatory decision making.

That participatory decision making process is particularly important for rurban regions like King and Caledon when faced with development pressures from urban neighbours like Toronto, Mississauga and Brampton. Every delegate from a rural or northern

community had the same concern: land use planning is changing and we have to apply new best practices like the Integrated Development Planning Model (IDPM).
Large urban centres do not understand that rural communities do not want to pave paradise and put up a parking lot. There is a good reason why our planning process is so detailed with the additional layers of complying with the Greenbelt, Oak Ridges Moraine, and Niagara Escarpment Plans. And we have no intention of giving up that green and carefully planned future.
As citizens who value our landscapes, our health, our generations to come, and our ecology and economy, we know what we should be doing to meet the accelerating climate challenges of the 21st century. But, to quote Teddy Roosevelt: ?Knowing what's right doesn't mean much unless you do what's right.?
We're all signed up, neigbours. It is time to do what's right.

Skid Crease is an accredited member of the Association of Canadian Journalists. He is an award-winning outdoor and environmental educator, a keynote speaker, a storyteller, an author, and a community volunteer. He taught with the North York and Toronto District School boards for 35 years, and officially ?retired? from the Faculty of Education, York University, where he was a Course Director and Environmental Science Advisor. Skid has worked with scientists from Environment Canada (pre-2005), NASA, and the Hadley Centre for Climate Prediction and Research in a quest to put an understandable story behind the wealth of their scientific data.