

## CLIMATE CHANGE CHRONICLE 32

### A Successful/Disastrous Economy

The title of this chronicle is an oxymoron, a figure of speech that links two apparently contradictory concepts together (like “make haste slowly”). In this chronicle I will explore the two contrasting concepts—a successful economy that is also a disaster. The contrast is also evident in political leadership, both in the U.S. and in Canada.

In 1992, James Carville, the major campaign strategist for Bill Clinton’s upcoming election, was asked about the key to a successful campaign. He responded, “*It’s the economy, Stupid.*” And it is.

In recent days American media are raving about the successful American economy. The U.S. stock market has reached an all-time high and economists are telling us we have finally come out of the 2008 depression. President Trump, of course, is taking complete credit for this “accomplishment” and claims he is responsible for a good part of it.

He has opened resource development in the oceans, in the national parks, in Alaska and in the Arctic. He has removed constraints on development that emerged out of past disasters. He has removed all strictures on the development of fossil fuels. He is promoting the development of coal. He is in a trade war with China and other countries that are developing solar panels and other helpful materials.

Trump has adopted a unique hiring strategy—sending the foxes to protect the hen house. He has been hiring former senior executives and lobbyists of resource development corporations to oversee all aspects of departments that have anything to do with the environment. Apparently the term “climate change” is a no-no in the White House. And to make the economic wheel turn faster Trump has significantly reduced the taxes of the world’s wealthy and powerful elite. They can then rake in huge profits investing in resource development corporations that he is promoting.

Observing all of this we Canadians really don’t have anything to feel superior or smug about. It seems Trump may have taken a page from the play book of our former Prime Minister Stephen Harper.

Harper removed much of the environmental legislation designed to control fossil fuel developments, especially laws protecting rivers and larger bodies of water. He saw these laws as hindering the development of pipelines.

He closed scientific environmental laboratories around the country and he began to crack down on environmental organizations for their involvement in politics. He removed their tax-exempt status. (I remember it well because our local branch of the Sierra Club was forced to take down its webpage. Most of us felt that we could not be effective unless we got involved in politics—so we closed up shop).

More recently in Canada, something similar is happening at the provincial level. The governments of Alberta, Manitoba, Ontario and New Brunswick see a successful economy as one based upon the export or acquisition of fossil fuels. They are in a pitched battle with Ottawa over its fossil fuel tax.

A day or so after his successful win in Alberta over the New Democratic Party, Jason Kenny, a former cabinet minister in the Harper government, held a meeting with the fossil fuel executives. This was apparently his first order of business as premier. His province with its tar sands is by far the major polluter in Canada. He refused to adopt the federal government's carbon tax. He announced that he was so opposed to it that he was ready to lead Alberta out of Confederation.

So the success of the economy in the U.S. and Canada is often a disaster for the Earth we depend upon for our continued existence. We have adopted and promoted "successful" economic systems that enable unlimited growth of our Neo-liberal Gross Domestic Product at the expense of Earth's Gross Product.

I think we are becoming more aware of the disaster and it is coming home to haunt us. We are learning to recognize what was expressed most succinctly by the American poet Robert Haas. *"We are the only protectors, and we are the thing that needs to be protected, and we are what it needs to be protected from."*

So is there any hope? I think there is if we understand the true nature of hope. It is not some imaginary, airy-fairy dream that things will work out in this climate changing world closing in on us. It is the tough kind of hope that St. Augustine described.

He was the Bishop of Hippo, a town in Africa, in a time of radical transition. It was the end of the five hundred year reign of the Roman Empire. The barbarians were pounding on the gates of the city and they controlled the crops outside the gates. Augustine, with most other residents, may have died from starvation.

Augustine said, *"Hope has two beautiful daughters. Their names are Anger and Courage. Anger at the way things are and Courage to see that they do not remain the way they are."*

If we are to survive in this climate changing world we must get angry and replace the so-called "successful" economic systems that are destroying our future. We must have the courage to develop mutually enhancing economic systems that will benefit both Earth and ourselves. And...we must act quickly.

It will be a struggle.

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