

# ECONEWS

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## THE CHALLENGE OF LEADERSHIP

Here in British Columbia, both of our big political parties are in the middle of leadership races, while the Green Party awaits the results.

What does it mean to exercise leadership at such a critical time? There are plenty of issues on which leadership is needed, such as the need to eliminate homelessness, raise the minimum wage, support BC's schools, and get the provincial deficit under control.

These are all important, and need action, but they are only the trimmings compared to the real issue where leadership is needed, not just in BC but everywhere.

Here's the reality we must address - and it must be the measure of any would-be leader that they understand it, speak to it, and make the commitment to tackle it.

As a civilization, ecologically, we are living far beyond our means. The stores are full, the roads are full, and our diaries are full of vacation plans - but there's a cost. All this "stuff" that defines the good life has to come from somewhere.

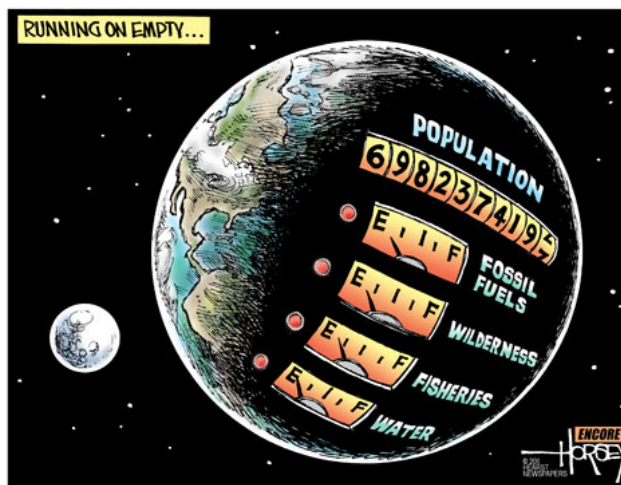
The fish come from the sea - but as a world we are driving so many fish stocks into extinction that unless we stop, our children will eat jellyfish.

The timber comes from the forest - but as a province, we are cutting down BC's last remaining oldgrowth trees.

The food comes from the land - but only a fraction is grown organically, and whenever it is not, soil is lost, wildlife is dying, and rural landscapes are turning sterile.

The energy we love comes from fossil fuels - but the carbon that is released is warming the atmosphere, with devastating consequences that are already showing up in the worldwide increase in extreme downpours, floods, fires and droughts.

And as a result of the way we live, pursuing our many desires, species are going extinct a hundred times faster than the normal background evolutionary extinction rate. Extinction means forever - never to exist again.



If everyone on the planet consumed as we do - to which many aspire - we would need three more planets. And meanwhile, our population is still growing; we will pass seven billion this fall.

This ecological living beyond our means is not something we can solve by issuing bonds (unless they are green bonds), as we do for financial debt. We are not only stealing our children's financial future: we are stealing the very planet they will live on, stripping it of the creatures, soil, fresh water and atmospheric stability they will need when we are gone.

The looming impacts of global warming alone are so severe that on our present track of fossil-fuelled economic growth we are heading for a 4°C global temperature rise; the last time things were 3°C warmer, the sea level was 25 metres higher. This will flood every city at sea-level; every port; every river estuary. Even before the century is out, as Greenland melts, we could see a two metre sea-level rise.

How should a true leader respond to a crisis of this magnitude? Green platitudes are not enough. The crisis calls for us to turn our whole civilization into a new direction, in which every economic decision we take restores nature, instead of - by default - destroying it.

When the challenge is broken down to manageable chunks, many solutions already exist, but many also call for people to change - to change their light bulbs, to change the fish they eat, to pay more in carbon taxes, to make space for bicycle lanes. When leadership is weak, it is easy to perceive these changes as interfering irritations, and evidence that the government is packed with nasty civil servants who want to control our lives.

A true leader would spell out the crisis in strong, clear terms, so that we knew what we were dealing with.

A true leader would be able to see the outline of a future in which our civilization operates in harmony with nature, and have the confidence to know that we can get there, even if many of the details remain unknown.

A true leader would be able to engage people all across the province, overcoming political differences to enroll them in this, the greatest challenge, and to neutralize the whiners and complainers.

He or she would inspire them to work for future in which British Columbia becomes a global leader in demonstrating that a good quality of life need not require the destruction of species, the loss of forests, or the sacrifice of the future to climate change.

Somewhere, such a leader exists, for every real crisis brings forth its leaders. Is it one of the current candidates? It could well be, but we have yet to see,

*Guy Dauncey*