

By-law ?has made us prisoners?

We are seniors living on a fixed income and the Orangeville By-Law on Back Yard Fire Pits have made it impossible to enjoy our home. We have fire pits ALL around us. both sides as well as at the back of our garden. There is one fire pit less than 20 feet from our deck and the other is no more than 30 feet; our canopy has been burnt twice, and this we have to tolerate due to a by-law that allows a person to burn from 8:01 a.m. to 11:59 p.m. for their entertainment.

My husband has COPD and heart condition and is unable to endure the smoke and fumes from wood burning fires, so we are unable to sit out and enjoy the sunshine and our garden.

We are encouraged to conserve energy and be protective of our environment. Well, how do you do that, when you are unable to open your windows due to smoke and fumes?

This by-law has made us prisoners in our own home, and therefore we would like to see the By-Law that allows wood burning fires in back yards rescinded or at the very least modified to make it fair for all residents of Orangeville, not just a few.

Bob and Gloria Thomas

Orangeville

'Everything has changed'

Before first winning a minority government in 2006, Prime Minister Stephen Harper promised to get to the bottom of the climate file. Neither he, nor most members of his party, believed that greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from human activities were causing a climate crisis. Emission reduction regulations were clearly not necessary, they said. In a 2002 fundraising letter for the now-defunct Canadian Alliance, Harper called the U.N. climate process 'a socialist scheme to suck money out of wealth-producing nations.'

Somewhere along the road to power, everything changed. Now, like the Chretien and Martin Liberal governments before them, the Conservatives officially support U.N. negotiations to 'stop dangerous climate change.' In a futile attempt to mollify their opponents, they make GHG reduction pledges they have no chance, and, undoubtedly no intention, of keeping. They dump billions of dollars into projects that will do nothing to change the climate, no matter how one interprets the science since the U.N. treaty now being created includes an out clause for developing nations, the source of most of today's emissions. The 'first and overriding priorities' for developing countries, the base document asserts, are 'economic and social development and poverty eradication,' not GHG reduction.

So why does the Harper government support a process they so vehemently opposed before? The answer is simple: they are following the common perception that Canadians want them to work with the U.N. on climate change mitigation.

Last month's Forum Research poll concluded that a majority of Canadians 'believe the earth's climate is changing,' 'blame it on human activities,' and do not think 'the federal government is doing its bit to combat climate change.' Other polls show the same, although Canadians are never asked whether they think we are causing climate change that would be dangerous.

Regardless, government strategists have clearly concluded that they must play along with the climate scare until public opinion appears to have changed.

Government cannot lead public opinion, they assume. But recent studies show they are wrong.

In "Shifting public opinion on climate change: an empirical assessment of factors influencing concern over climate change in the U.S." published in the journal *Climatic Change*, researchers at Drexel University, McGill University, and Ohio State University showed that the stated positions of politicians and other "elites" in society is the major factor driving public opinion. The analysis, based on an examination of 74 separate surveys over a 9-year period, supported the 2009 conclusion of Harvard University's Susan McDonald that "When elites have consensus, the public follows suit and the issue becomes mainstreamed. When elites disagree, polarization occurs, and citizens rely on other indicators" to make up their minds."

The Drexel/McGill/Ohio State study showed that, when prominent Republicans worked with the Democrats in support of the dangerous global warming hypothesis, the public was far more supportive of this position.

But, after the Republicans split with the Democrats on climate change in 2008, there was a sudden drop in the fraction of the public who "worried a great deal" about climate.

Public support for climate mitigation remains higher in Canada than in the U.S. largely because the issue has all party support here, while it is polarized in America. Clearly, the government's strong advocacy of the issue must stop if they want Canadian public support for GHG regulations to diminish.

Instead of making GHG reduction commitments, the Harper government needs to set the stage so that the public can more frequently hear the voices of leading skeptics. Supporting an open, unbiased climate science conference, inviting in experts from all reputable points of view, would be a start. So would occasionally bringing up the growing credibility of the worldwide skeptic movement, as a reason for going slow on GHG regulations.

But first, MPs need to educate themselves. This means listening to both sides of the debate, not just David Suzuki's. An ideal opportunity to quickly get up to speed on the skeptics' position is taking place in Washington DC on June 11 and 12. There, leading scientists, economists, and policy experts will participate in the Tenth International Conference on Climate Change (ICCC-10), an event designed to help policy makers understand what is really going on in the field. Every presentation will be broadcast on the Web in both real time and afterwards.

ICCC-10 will demonstrate that Harper's original position was right all along. Rather than trying to control climate as if we had a global thermostat, Canada should support adaptation to natural climate variability as a more cost effective and humane solution.

It's time for Harper to lead on this file if we are to avoid being sucked into another Kyoto Protocol. Simply waiting for public opinion to change while the Government helps feed the fire that threatens to burn down our economy, betrays us all.

Tom Harris is Executive Director of the Ottawa-based International Climate Science Coalition