

No Kyoto means No Solution

by

William Leiss and Stephen Hill

Submission to *The Calgary Herald*

November 7, 2002

When you poll, the results you get pretty much depend on how you ask the question. The latest Ipsos-Reid opinion poll results allegedly show an even split nationally between those favoring Kyoto ratification, on the one hand, and those opting for withdrawal from Kyoto plus a “made-in-Canada solution for reducing greenhouse gases,” on the other. At first glance this looks as if the pollsters gave Canadians two pretty straightforward alternatives from which to choose.

Had the respondent asked politely what the ‘made-in-Canada solution’ is, the pollster’s response might have been: “Well, it’s not really a *solution*, really, more like a ‘gesture,’ perhaps, or maybe a ‘placeholder’ for a solution. Take your pick. I need your answer.” Or, after a long day of fending off this question from the hapless citizens who were on the polling list, perhaps the pollster might have said: “Look, your guess is as good as mine, let’s just get on with it.”

Canadians are, by and large, a trusting sort of people. If someone calls and asks us to choose between two alternative options, we’re probably inclined to believe that both options actually exist. Certainly, when one appears to represent a homegrown solution, whereas the other smells like some nefarious foreign plot, who wouldn’t choose the homegrown one? But if you found out later that the option you chose turned out to

have a somewhat vaporous quality, resembling nothing so much as a fleeting cloud-formation, wouldn't you be inclined to think that someone was trying to pull the wool over your eyes?

Currently there is no "made-in-Canada solution for reducing greenhouse gases" as an alternative to Kyoto. It doesn't exist. This is an awkward fact, but a fact nonetheless. "Made in Canada" is the header on the website run by something called the "Canadian Coalition for Responsible Environmental Solutions," an odd name for an anti-Kyoto lobbying effort by three dozen industry associations.¹ Its position paper lists the many things its own solution "would" include, if it were to exist some day. But they don't have one yet, even though the climate change issue has never been far from the headlines for almost fifteen years. Isn't it a little late to be getting into the game now?

The provincial ministers left the Halifax meeting last week apparently resolved to come up with their own "greenhouse gas reduction plan." Why? And why now? Who knows, maybe they will do a plan, because what there is now – considered as a national alternative to Kyoto – is just a hodgepodge of desperate and contradictory gambits by assorted provincial premiers and industry associations. The sole exception is the Alberta plan for reductions in emissions intensity, but whatever its merits may be, it's not about finding a global solution to a global problem.

¹ See the Canadian Coalition for Responsible Environmental Solutions (CCRES) website, www.canadiansolution.com. Last accessed: 7 November 2002.

Since it's likely that the federal government will ratify Kyoto soon, does all this matter? We think it does, because what's more important than whether Canada ratifies Kyoto or not is that Canadians understand what the choice means. What needs clarifying is this: If Canada were not to ratify Kyoto, it makes no sense to rush into some kind of "made-in-Canada plan" (should one ever appear) for reducing greenhouse gases. We agree with *National Post* columnist Andrew Coyne that all this talk about "detailed plans," including the demand for the federal government to produce one prior to ratification, is a fetish. According to Coyne and many economists, the most efficient approach is to use fiscal instruments such as a carbon tax or widespread emissions trading to let the market find the best way to reduce emissions.

If we're concerned about a global climate risk scenario driven by rising greenhouse gases, then an international agreement is needed to respond to it. This is the only hope we have for eventually getting all countries on-side to control emissions. On the other hand, if we reject Kyoto, this means we've given up on the rest of the world: Let them do their thing, and we'll do ours. Remember: By definition, no "made-in-Canada" plan, no matter how grand its eventual design, can even pretend to offer a global solution.

On the other hand, many large Canadian firms have made clear commitments to reducing emissions or emissions intensity, or both, in their own operations, as a part of appropriate environmental management in the absence of any binding Kyoto target.

This includes Dow,² Dupont,³ Nexen,⁴ Suncor,⁵ TransAlta,⁶ Shell,⁷ BP Amoco,⁸ and others.⁹ Their public reports show that they are making steady progress in this regard. Good for them. Municipalities have acted to reduce emissions from their landfill sites and other areas. Good for them. These commitments will continue whatever else happens.

But if you accept the argument that human actions are contributing to climate change risk, you also know that only concerted actions by all nations will give us a chance to reduce that risk. Kyoto opponents harp on Canada's small contribution to global emissions. So why bother having an all-embracing domestic plan anyway? Emissions

² See The Dow Chemical Company: 'The Dow Global Public Report, 2001: Climate Change.' Available at: <http://www.dow.com/publicreport/2001/stewardship/climate.htm>; 'The Dow Global Public Report, 2001: Greenhouse Gas Emissions.' Last updated: N.A. Available at: <http://www.dow.com/publicreport/2001/stewardship/emissions.htm>; and 'The Dow Global Public Report, 2001: Greenhouse Gas Intensity.' Available at: <http://www.dow.com/publicreport/2001/stewardship/intensity.htm>. All pages last accessed: 7 November 2002.

³ See DuPont. 'Position Statements: Global Climate Change.' Available at: http://www.dupont.com/corp/news/position/global_climate.html. Last accessed: 7 November 2002.

⁴ See Nexen. 'Safety, Environment and Social Responsibility: Reducing Global Gas Emissions.' Available at: <http://www.nexeninc.com/about/social.htm>. Last accessed: 7 November 2002.

⁵ See Suncor Energy. 'Climate Change.' Available at: http://www.suncor.com/bins/content_page.asp?cid=2-41-605. Last accessed: 7 November 2002.

⁶ See TransAlta. 'TransAlta Unveils Proposal to Reduce Net Greenhouse Gas Emissions to Zero.' Last updated: 25 January 2002. Available at: <http://www.transalta.com/website2001/tawebiste.nsf/AllIDoc/299645E049152D9F872569B600344059?OpenDocument>. Last accessed: 7 November 2002.

⁷ See Shell Canada: 'Shell Canada Commitment on Climate Change.' Available at: <http://www.shell.ca/code/values/climate/commitment.html>; 'Shell Canada Climate Change Strategy.' Available at: <http://www.shell.ca/code/values/climate/strategy.html>; and 'Climate Change Management Plan.' Last updated: N.A. Available at: http://www.shell.ca/code/values/climate/mgmt_plan.html. All pages last accessed: 7 November 2002.

⁸ See BP: 'Climate Change.' Available at: http://www.bp.com/enviro_social/environment/climate_change/index.asp; 'Our Performance.' Last updated: N.A. Available at: http://www.bp.com/enviro_social/environment/climate_change/our_performance/index.asp. All pages last accessed: 7 November 2002.

⁹ See Federation of Canadian Municipalities: '2002 Policy Statement on Environmental Issues.' Available at: <http://www.fcm.ca/english/national/enviro2.htm>; and 'Municipal Perspective on Government of Canada Draft Climate Change Plan.' Last updated: 25 October 2002. Available at: <http://www.fcm.ca/newfcm/java/perspective.htm>. All pages last accessed: 7 November 2002. See also Centre for Sustainable Community Development. 'About Climate Change: FCM and the Municipal Response.' Available at: http://www.fcm.ca/scep/support/PCP/pcp_cc_municipal_response.htm. Last accessed: 7 November 2002.

reductions require investment of resources. Why should provinces propose investing in a domestic emissions reduction plan, if it's not going to address global climate risk? Why assign this a high priority, when there are so many other pressures on provincial budgets, especially healthcare?

We're not among those who think that Canada should refuse to ratify Kyoto. This is because we think that the only sensible approach to global climate risk is a global treaty, and Kyoto is the only such treaty on offer. We think that it's wise for all Canadians, and all levels of government, to invest in emissions reductions for the purpose of meeting our Kyoto targets. We also think that it's a waste of time and resources to design a go-it-alone national plan, because there's no obvious need for it.

If Kyoto opponents finally were to succeed in derailing ratification by Canada, citizens must then tell their provincial governments not to waste their taxpayer dollars designing an alternative plan! On the other hand, it really won't be necessary for them to send this message, will it? If the federal resolve to ratify Kyoto were to collapse, how many provincial governments or industry associations can be expected to devote any serious attention thereafter to devising an "action plan" on climate change?

WILLIAM LEISS IS RESEARCH CHAIR IN RISK COMMUNICATION & PUBLIC POLICY, HASKAYNE SCHOOL OF BUSINESS, UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY, WHERE STEPHEN HILL IS A POSTDOCTORAL FELLOW