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CLIMATE CHANGE RESISTANCE IS FUTILE SO BUILD ALL THE PIPELINES

If climate optimism won't save us, goes the argument, we might as well keep profiting from carbon "Resistance is futile," says the Borg in the Star Trek TV series. The phrase, spoken by the collective machine intelligence or "hive mind" which is the enemy of all Star Trek individualists, has become an ironic meme on the internet. The phrase came to mind this week following news articles on the economic pressure to expand Canadian oil and gas production in the face of Canada's commitment to reduce carbon output. And it leaves the Liberal government with a series of knotty problems. The nub of the difficulty comes down to the seemingly inevitable conflict between the economy and climate change. The question the Liberal cabinet must ask itself is how much economic and political sacrifice it is willing to make to adhere to its international climate commitment. There's a bigger question we must all ask ourselves. Is fighting climate change even possible, or to put it another way, are the economic sacrifices for the Canadian economy so great that we must ignore climate commitments and worry about jobs? Crude oil cars at the Irving Oil terminal, which many in the Canadian oil industry hope to replace with a pipeline, as they say it will be safer and more efficient. (Reuters)

It was actually an op-ed in the Globe and Mail that made me focus on the question. The writer effectively proposes that despite the potential cost of "a warming planet and catastrophic climate change," economic growth demands that we continue to pump out carbon. Trying to do otherwise is futile. In some ways, complete denial that climate change exists would make an easier argument. For those who are convinced that rising temperatures are a blip or caused by sun spots or divine intervention, ignoring the carbon cutting message may seem like plain sense. For those who believe what the vast majority of scientists say — that climate change is caused by the industrial

process of liberating millions of years of geologically trapped carbon into the atmosphere that will cause irreversible, "catastrophic," destruction to the planet — the economic case against climate change seems much more difficult. The arguments are not new, but they come in a category that seems to say 'it's awful but there is just nothing we can do about it' and that optimism around limiting climate change is well-meaning but misguided.

This gloomy inevitability is supported by arguments that demonstrate our hands are tied, that economic growth can only happen in the presence of growing fossil fuel use, that if we stop some other country will just produce more, or that we have already gone too far and are doomed no matter what we do. Climate change critics say there is little point in Canada cutting back on greenhouse gas production if countries like China and India keeps on pumping out carbon. There is danger in such arguments because they are an excuse to do nothing. In a perverse way they favour the status quo and the pro-carbon lobby. They give permission to continue extracting and burning increasing amounts of fossil fuels. They encourage the building of pipelines and other infrastructure because, what the heck, we should make hay while the sun shines. The argument in favour of protecting people's jobs and livelihoods is probably the strongest one in favour of continuing to expand oil and gas exports. The political power of that argument is what makes it so difficult for governments to fight increased carbon extraction.

The argument that change is impossible, that optimism is futile, however, is a bad place to start. If indeed climate change has the potential to be catastrophic, to flood some of the world's biggest cities, to destroy agricultural lands and livelihoods in Africa and Asia, to wipe out whole groups of plant and animal ecosystems, then 'sorry our hands are tied' seems like a bad argument.

Yes, the recent industrial economy has grown in parallel with oil production. But in the past the same thing could have been said for charcoal and leather products.



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In a nod to the famous quote from Saudi oil minister Sheikh Ahmed Zaki Yamani, at one point surely economic growth in the stone age increased with the use of stones. Circa 1975: Saudi Arabian oil minister Sheik Ahmed Zaki Yamani was



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famous for the quote 'The Stone Age came to an end not for a lack of stones and the oil age will end, but not for a lack of oil.' (Hulton Archive/Getty)

If the scientists are right, then the carbon age must pass. And one or the other — African farmers or Alberta oil workers — will have to suffer economic consequences. The question is merely do governments have the political support to take action now or do we have to wait for some sort of greater crisis to concentrate people's minds and really prove the danger.

Of course the longer we wait the more it will strengthen the "it's too late, we're doomed" argument.

In another recent op-ed, Thomas Homer-Dixon, author of *The Upside of Down*, condemned the NDP's Leap document because it conflated climate change with a lot of other issues of the political left.

Climate change is not a left-right issue. Avoiding economic destruction will be profitable for the companies able to create the technology of the post-carbon era.

Alberta companies will make some of those profits. It is hard to imagine that the oil giants will not profit from those technologies as well, if they allow themselves to change with the times.

In the war against climate change, as in anywar, there are always defeatists. The war may not be won. It may not be winnable. But believing the defeatists inevitably leads to defeat.

The irony of the "resistance is futile" meme is that the Star Trek heroes always resist and always win in the end. But of course that's just television.

FORT MCMURRAY BRACES FOR HIGH WINDS IN BATTLE WITH WILDFIRE

Winds picking up late Monday firefighters battling a blaze just 1,200 metres outside Fort McMurray say they're now bracing for the worst. Wind that dropped off overnight, giving crews a short reprieve from the approaching flames, is once again picking up, blowing from the southeast as scorching temperatures return this afternoon. The blaze, which is estimated to cover between 500 and 750 hectares of boreal forest, is only 1.2 km from the western

edge of Alberta's oilsands city. Fire chief Darby Allen said there had been "no significant change" to the fire overnight. "The fire didn't really extend in size," he said. "It didn't gain ferocity. In fact, it calmed down quite a bit overnight." But conditions are expected to worsen as Monday afternoon progresses, and could reach their peak by mid-afternoon.

The weather has made the fire's progress hard to track. Extremely dense smoke made it impossible for aerial crews to accurately measure the fire. "There is very little to no wind," Allen said. "Generally, no wind is a good news story for us. The bad news side of it is, when the aircraft go up in the air, they can't where see the front of the fire, or any of the fire perimeter is. That smoke will lift and it will better enable the forestry guys to see exactly what's going on, and where to dump that water. Twenty-eight firefighters, seven helicopters, and two air-tanker teams are currently battling the fire. A mandatory evacuation order, issued Sunday night, remained in effect for Prairie Creek neighbourhood and Centennial Trailer Park. The mandatory evacuation notice for the Gregoire area was reduced Monday to a voluntary shelter-in-place notice for the residential neighbourhood east of Gregoire Drive and Mackenzie Boulevard, and north of Mackay Crescent and Maclean Road. Emergency officials plan to reassess the evacuation orders and provide an update to the community by 5:30 pm. Monday. An emergency reception centre at MacDonald Island Park remains open. The Greely Road School and Islamic School remain closed, and the city has been dealing with sporadic power outages. Both Allen and Wood Buffalo Mayor Melissa Blake thanked the community for their outpouring of support for evacuees and first responders. "I want to thank everybody, from the folks on the ground fighting this, to the people in the air, to the people in this room," said Blake. Allen said their emergency control centre has been inundated with calls from people looking to help fellow residents, so many that their volunteer operations are past capacity. "We are getting a tremendous amount of calls from people that live in this area. It's heartwarming. It's wonderful." Premier Rachel Notley said she was she was briefed about the fire on Monday morning, and expected another briefing later in the day. "We will do what is necessary to fight these fires to the absolute maximum," she said. "There's no way, shape or form that would be changed or restricted in any way." On Sunday night, Allen was concerned

about the flames inching closer to residential areas. About 500 people were told to leave their homes. Blake declared a state of emergency in the Gregoire neighbourhood just before 10 p.m. on Sunday, as the fire burned less than 500 metres from the Hangingstone River, which is bordered on the east side by Highway 63. Jordan Redshaw, spokesman for the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo, said the long-range forecast calls for three days of hot, dry weather. A special air quality advisory was in effect for the region. "Individuals may experience symptoms such as increased coughing, throat irritation, headaches or shortness of breath," Environment Canada stated.

"Children, seniors and those with cardiovascular or lung disease, such as asthma, are especially at risk." Mark MacKay was still at work, 40 kilometres north of the city, when he heard that his Prairie Creek neighbourhood was being evacuated. He said he was shocked to see the flames along the skyline as he rushed home along Highway 63. "It was very high in the sky at one point," he said. "When I was coming back from work, you could see the flames along the tree line, and that's 40 kilometres away."

MacKay said when he reached the city, he wasn't able to get to his house, because the evacuation order was already in place.

"I tried to get back to grab some of my personal belongings, and I can't get back at all."

MacKay is staying with friends

until the evacuation order is lifted but went to the emergency reception centre on Sunday night to register as an evacuee.

"They were really great, but it's kind of quiet, sombre, eerie feeling when you walk in there," he said. "There were a lot of families around there registering."

Missy Howlett said there was a chaotic scene in Gregoire on Sunday when the evacuation order was issued. Watching from their homes, she said residents could see flames fill the whole sky.

"It was pretty scary," she said. "It was so close, it looked like it was just going to come right over our houses. It looked like the whole sky was on fire."

Blake said a few hundred people ended up staying overnight at the emergency reception centre.

As of Monday morning, she remained hopeful that firefighters would gain the upper hand so that all evacuees could return home.

CANADA SET TO MAKE PETRONAS LNG DECISION AS EARLY AS MID-SUMMER

The Canadian government expects to make a decision on environmental approvals for Petroliam Nasional Bhd.'s C\$36 billion (\$29 billion) liquefied natural gas project on the nation's Pacific coast by mid- to late-summer. Petronas, as the Malaysian company is known, is expected to provide further information to regulators soon, completing its application for the Pacific NorthWest LNG development, James Carr,




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Canada's natural resources minister, said Monday in an interview in Kitakyushu, Japan. "Very shortly after that, the clock begins to tick," he said. "The government of Canada has given its assurance that a decision will be made within 90 days of that moment." While Canada seeks to catch up with global LNG competitors such as Australia and the U.S., its developers are struggling after the oil-market collapse brought down LNG prices and forced companies to cut spending on projects. The Petronas development has been held up by opposition from an aboriginal group near the site of its proposed shipping terminal.

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Circa 1975: Saudi Arabian oil minister Sheik Ahmed Zaki Yamani was famous for the quote 'The Stone Age came to an end not for a lack of stones and the oil age will end, but not for a lack of oil.' (Hulton Archive/Getty)

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FIRE FORCES CLOSURE OF SHELL OILSANDS PROJECT

The wildfire raging through the heart of Canada's oilsands capital dealt a blow Wednesday to crude operations, with Shell Canada closing a major mining facility north of Fort McMurray, Alta. The company temporarily shut down production at its Albian Sands mining operations located about 70 kilometres north of the city. Shell said it made the decision to focus on getting employees and their families out of the region while also freeing up room at its 2,000-person work camp for some of the 80,000 people who were ordered evacuated Tuesday from Fort McMurray. "Right now, our priority is providing support for our people, their loved ones and others in the area," Shell spokesman Cameron Yost said in an email. "Our work camp, the Albian Village, is now open to all evacuated Fort McMurray residents who need a safe place to stay and we are evacuating non-essential staff to make room for those who need it most." Shell is employing its landing strip to fly employees and their families to Calgary or Edmonton and has provided two teams to support firefighting efforts in the region. Its two mines at Albian Sands have the capacity to produce 255,000 barrels of oil per day. Suncor Energy said it has reduced production and staffing levels at the Millennium and North Steepbank mines, its main oilsands project just north of Fort McMurray. It said the facility is not in immediate danger from the fire. "Our facilities are currently well removed from the fires and are not physically threatened, however, we

are operating at reduced rates," spokesman Paul Newmarch said in an email. "We have evacuated all non-essential employees and continue to provide employee updates through our Facebook page."

Most incoming and departing flights at the Fort McMurray International Airport, located southeast of the city centre, were cancelled Wednesday. Canada's oilsands are considered the third-largest reserves of crude oil in the world, with 166 billion barrels of recoverable oil covering 142,000 square kilometres.

OILSANDS PRODUCTION HIT BY FORT MCMURRAY FIRES AS COMPANIES FOCUS ON EMPLOYEES, EVACUEES

Most major oilsands facilities north of Fort McMurray curtailed operations Wednesday because of the raging forest fires. While the plants are 25 to 95 kilometres away from the city and considered out of danger, companies decided to act because of the disruptions faced by staff and their families living in the area. Shell shut down production at its Albian Sands mining operations so it can focus on getting people out of the region, spokesman Cameron Yost said in an email. "Right now, our priority is providing support for our people, their loved ones and others in the area," he said. "Our work camp, the Albian Village, is now open to all evacuated Fort McMurray residents who need a safe place to stay and we are evacuating non-essential staff to make room for those who need it most." About 25 evacuation flights took off from the Albian airstrip, which is being used to assist people leaving from the

Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation, Mikisew Cree First Nation and other locations. The site produces about 225,000 barrels of oil a day, or 17 per cent of Canada's total oil output. Suncor reduced work at its base plant, the closest facility to Fort McMurray, as well as the MacKay River and Firebag in situ facilities further north. "We have evacuated all non-essential employees from across our operations in the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo," Suncor spokesman Paul Newmarch said. "It's just to allow them to be with their families. It's pretty trying times." The base plant had already cut output for a turnaround. The company normally produces about 400,000 barrels a day in the area. Syncrude also reduced operations, which are primarily located at the Mildred Lake and Aurora sites at least 35 kilometres north of the city. The facilities have a capacity to produce 350,000 barrels of oil a day, but the company isn't revealing how much this has been cut, company spokeswoman Cheryl Robb said.

Syncrude took the move so it can care for 2,000 people staying at its normally unused Mildred Lake Village, she said. "We're focused, really, on those folks and our employees and their families."

Imperial Oil's Kearl plant, which produces about 110,000 barrels of oil daily, sent away all except essential staff, but says the move didn't affect their operations. Operations also remained stable at Canadian Natural Resources Ltd.'s 130,000-barrel-a-day Horizon oilsands mine and upgrader, about 80 kilometres north of the city, the company said in a news release. It's providing accommodation at its

camp for about 800 people, including employees and their families, along with assistance from its airfield for firefighting efforts and staff and equipment to help fight fires. Enbridge Inc., one of the region's major pipeline operators, said its operations and facilities haven't been hurt, although it continues to monitor the situation. Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo Mayor Melissa Blake said the loss of homes in Fort McMurray will affect the oilsands industry. "The company that's hosting my family right now is certainly reducing its operations and making as much space available as they can to evacuees," she said. "I would have an expectation that industry would find a way to meet their needs while being sensitive to what's happening in the community, because that's all I'm seeing — an outpouring of support coming from our industry." Calgary analyst Tim Pickering, president of Auspice Capital Advisors, said the normal price spread between West Texas Intermediate oil and Alberta crude narrowed Wednesday in response to the possibility of supply being disrupted. However, there's lots of oil in storage to keep pipelines filled, so he doesn't expect the fire to have a long-term price impact unless production is cut by hundreds of thousands of barrels a day for at least a month. "Should that be the case where actual facilities are being damaged, then you have a much bigger issue."



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