

Proposed Northland Power Expansion: Presentation to Thorold City Council

J. Hamilton, 06.09.23

Clean Green Thorold

Proposed Northland Power Expansion

“We are damned fools...”

35 years ago, in 1988, James Hansen, a scientist at NASA testified before the US senate. He told the hearing that global heating, linked to the burning of fossil fuels was predicted to lead towards a “new climate frontier” unlike anything seen on Earth in a million years.

35 years later, Hansen, quoted in The Guardian¹, said that the recent record heatwaves have heightened “a sense of disappointment that we scientists did not communicate more clearly and that we did not elect leaders capable of a more intelligent response.”

Hansen says, “We are damned fools...we are headed wittingly into the new reality – we knew it was coming...and things will get worse before they get better.”

“Nothing is adapted to this...”

Matthew Huber, an expert in paleoclimatology at Purdue University, says, “We are pushing temperatures up to Pliocene levels, which is outside the realm of human experience; it’s such a massive change that most things on Earth haven’t had to deal with it...It’s basically an experiment on humans and ecosystems to see how they respond.”

The 5 Stages of Grief

“We have been staring this in the face as scientists for decades, but now the world is going through that same process, which is like the five stages of grief,” says Huber.

For decades, the fossil fuel industry has lied, bribed and manipulated the facts to keep populations in a state of denial. And many of us were comfortable with that. I mean, after all, what do scientists know?

Some of us got angry and signed petitions or voted Green.

Some of us bargained - the plane is going to fly to Australia whether I’m on it or not, so...I’ll call you when I get back.

¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/jul/19/climate-crisis-james-hansen-scientist-warning>

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Some of us got depressed; decades after we knew what was wrong and what was causing it, nothing had really happened to change things and we were helpless in the face of a disturbing reality.

Some of us reached the stage of acceptance; yes, this is really happening and, unless we act now, we know how it ends.

Jobs, jobs, jobs...

In 1967 Suncor (or the Great Canadian Oil Sands consortium, as it then was) began production in the tar sands of Alberta. They stripped the land of the boreal forest to mine bitumen that had lain buried for millions of years. Fifty-odd years later, you can inhale the smoke from the burning of what remains of that forest right in the privacy of your own home.

Jobs, they said, jobs! And tens of thousands flocked to Alberta over the decades to get jobs. And everyone got fat and happy and drove vehicles named for the landscapes they despoil; Tundra, Yukon, Sierra, etc.

“But, but”, said Greenpeace and David Suzuki, “what about the environment? Leave it in the ground!”

“Oh, we can’t do that,” said governments, “people will lose their jobs...and if that happens, I may lose mine, so no deal.” And gas was cheap, at least until Justin Trudeau and his leftie, pinko carbon tax stepped in.

The luck of the draw...

What, how and when the climate crisis will affect us is down to the luck of the draw. Maybe, like Nova Scotia or Greece, Thorold will be hit with wildfires and flooding within weeks of one another.

Maybe the impact will be skyrocketing prices for food, when whole swathes of agricultural land turn to dust and rivers dry up, as is happening in California.

Maybe those more numerous, stronger Atlantic hurricanes will track inland and devastate the Niagara Peninsula, leaving thousands of climate refugees in their wake. Or, maybe the spotted lanternfly will travel from the US and wipe out Niagara’s grape crop and the accompanying tourism “industry”.

We don’t know. But, what we do know is that we will not be unaffected.

A dog in this fight...

I have a dog in this fight. I don’t have children or grandchildren but, I have nieces and nephews and godchildren and friends who do. So, yes, it matters to me that they have some prospect of a future.

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Northland has a dog in this fight. If they can get this project approved, they and their shareholders will be guaranteed to make a pile of money. And we will pay and continue to pay through the nose for however many generations are left to us.

“But, jobs!” they will say...until their plant becomes a stranded asset and we have to bail them out.

Two Questions...

As you consider your vote to approve or disapprove this expansion of fossil fuel infrastructure, here in Thorold in 2023, I would ask you to remember something else that Matthew Huber, the paleoclimatologist said. “...we can't simply give up because the situation is dire. We need to say 'Here is where we need to invest and make changes and innovate' and not give up. We can't just write off billions of people.”

And I would ask you to ask yourselves two questions. If not me, who? If not now, when?