



Low carbon tech is key

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Many Canadians are gripped with an ominous sense of pessimism. Economists worry about a recession while environmentalists are having panic attacks about greenhouse gases. Consumers are hurting from the high, ever-increasing price of petroleum and are desperate for alternatives. Those who can afford them are buying hybrid cars and those who cannot are riding transit more often.

The foundation of Alberta's economy is finding and selling crude oil, natural gas and coal. Our buyers -- both nationally and in the U.S. -- are turning against carbon-based energy. They are afraid of the dire unintended consequences of burning of fossil fuels.

In short, this province's economy has been based on the production of cheap hydrocarbons. That reality is now threatened.

Today, Canadians believe renewable and efficient energy technology must replace fossil fuels and they want it to happen far faster than most Albertans currently anticipate. The enormity of the national energy and environmental crisis seems difficult to comprehend.

The Calgary Chamber of Commerce, never known to wallow in the Slough of Despond, believes this province has the potential to capitalize on what could be one of the world's most astonishing business opportunities -- low-carbon technologies.

Alberta needs a great, big vision -- call it the Carbon Mitigation Project -- to solve the greenhouse gas problem. This project would be for the bold and courageous.

The Chamber recommends:

- Create a new \$5-billion energy research endowment fund and hire the best and brightest scientists, engineers and entrepreneurs to invent low carbon technologies .
- Send the proper pricing signals to fossil fuel producers by adjusting the \$15 per tonne carbon emissions charge in a realistic timeframe that reflects the true cost of reducing carbon emissions while protecting the economy (call it an atmosphere improvement levy).
- Invent new technologies that will cut greenhouse gases and have the desired impact on atmospheric carbon.

The Chamber also challenges the many industries operating in Alberta to participate in the carbon mitigation project: Double fuel economy in vehicles, build efficient mass transit to take a millions of cars off the roads, develop zero-emission appliances, boost the efficiency of buildings by 25%, ramp up wind power to reduce or eliminate base load electricity generated by coal-fired plants, install solar panels in consumers' homes to manage peak electricity loads, build and certify new homes to Build Green standards, and all new commercial building are certified as LEED Gold.

The Calgary business community has already identified ways to minimize its carbon footprint.



They have reviewed their gas and electricity bills, vehicle usage, and employee travel.

Many have spent large sums to reduce direct and indirect emissions.

It is easy for industry to self-righteously point its finger at consumers of energy and lay the blame on them. They buy SUVs and burn fuel wastefully.

Conversely, the rest of Canada smugly blames the energy companies for greenhouse gas emissions.

It's easier to ask the federal government to pass punitive legislation targeting Alberta than to ride public transit.

The Chamber thinks the blame game is wrong and wastes time. Society must pay for the cost of cleaner fuels. Smart and capable Albertans can invent low carbon technologies to produce renewable, efficient energy.

Perhaps we should charge a premium for our expertise, once we have solved the greenhouse gas problem.