



David
Suzuki
Foundation

SOLUTIONS ARE IN OUR NATURE

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Let's raise the bar for 2014

By David Suzuki with contributions from Ian Hanington, Senior Editor

It's been a strange year. From the never-ending carnival of calamity at Toronto City Hall to the scandalous subterfuge on Parliament Hill, from horrific attacks by the Syrian government on its own citizenry to disasters inflicted by extreme weather on the people of the Philippines, 2013 recalls Queen Elizabeth's description of 1992 as an *annus horribilis*.

It got tiring and demoralizing watching Toronto Mayor Rob Ford sink to new depths daily, the scandals in the Prime Minister's Office and Senate grow deeper and wider, and disasters of war and weather increase in frequency and intensity. On top of it all, those of us who have taken on the often thankless task of trying to encourage people to care for the air, water, soil and diversity of plants and animals that keep us alive came under increasingly vituperative attacks from the media and even our own government.

Much of the corresponding commentary and analysis has become so stultifyingly stupid that people rely on late-night comedy shows for some semblance of insight to make sense of it all. It's as if the standards of discussion and debate, political discourse and leadership, have been diminished to the point of absurdity.

It hasn't been all bad, of course. When government focuses on the interests of the fossil fuel industry instead of the citizens it was elected to represent — spying on, demonizing and auditing citizens and organizations devoted to environmental protection, and spending taxpayers' money to promote pipeline and oil-extraction projects, as well as subsidizing the fossil fuel industry — people notice.

When media personalities and outlets throw their support behind the fossil fuel industry and launch malicious and unfounded attacks against anyone who dares call for rational discussion of energy and resource policies, they lose credibility and audience share.

Those who refuse to let disillusionment immobilize us are pushing back. Many who have become tired of media and governments ignoring our interests are joining the growing number of rallies and movements challenging Canada's becoming a petro-state, from opposition to Enbridge's Northern Gateway Pipeline project to November's Defend Our Climate, Defend Our Communities National Day of Action. And it's not just environmentalists showing up and speaking out. First Nations, organized labour, students and youth groups, business people and tens of thousands of citizens from all walks of life are coming together to call for a country and world governed for people, not corporations, where clean air, water, soil and biodiversity are protected for the benefit of us all and for our children and grandchildren to come. That's not an attack on corporations; many are ethically run. It's just recognition that the planet and its inhabitants come first.

Many people are trying to raise the bar, to promote rational dialogue and solutions, from individuals to online media outlets to business leaders and even some politicians. None of that rules out criticism and scrutiny; in fact, it demands it. We must all hold ourselves to higher standards and learn from others, acknowledge when we're wrong and change our views if new information calls for it. But we can't sink to the constant personal attacks and lies so often employed to deliberately sow doubt and confusion around critical, life-threatening issues like pollution, climate change and environmental degradation.

We're seeing more evidence every day of the damage we're doing to our only home, the Earth, with our unbridled pursuit of profit and endless growth, and our mad rush to extract all the planet's precious fossil fuels so that we can burn them as quickly as possible to make money while the market's hot. We're seeing increasing instances of the kinds of extreme weather events predicted by climate scientists, from flooding in Calgary and Toronto to typhoons and cyclones in the Philippines, Italy and India to tornados in the U.S. We're seeing mounting evidence of the consequences of our actions in the recent Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Fifth Assessment Report.

We're also seeing where solutions lie. There's still time to turn around, but we need everyone to raise the bar on discussion and action — in politics, the media and our own lives. Let's make the coming year a better one.

December 12, 2013

<http://www.davidsuzuki.org/blogs/science-matters/2013/12/lets-raise-the-bar-for-2014/>