

WITH Lawrence Solomon, *Executive Director of Energy Probe and Author of "The Deniers"*



Lawrence Solomon is the author of *The Deniers: The World Renowned Scientists Who Stood Up Against Global Warming Hysteria, Political Persecution, and Fraud**And those who are too fearful to do so*. He is Energy Probe's executive director, a columnist with *National Post* and a past columnist with the *Globe and Mail*. He founded or helped to found several environmental organizations, including the World Rainforest Movement, Friends of the Earth Canada, and Lake Ontario Keeper. Along with Jane Jacobs and others, he helped found Energy Probe. Lawrence Solomon's first book, *The Conserver Solution*, was a best seller and the bible of the environmental movement in the late 1970s. A subsequent book, *Breaking Up Ontario Hydro's Monopoly*, led to Hydro's dismantling after the leaders of all three provincial parties endorsed it. The UK privatization of its power system followed Solomon's model for the breakup of utilities. He also invented satellite

toll road technology that the EU and the UK seem set to adopt by 2014. Solomon was an adviser to President Carter's Global 2000 Report. He was interviewed before his Lunch on the Frontier speech in Winnipeg on June 26, 2008.

Frontier Centre: Can you tell us a bit about your environmental credentials? You have been a prominent critic, for example, of the energy industry.

Lawrence Solomon: I founded Energy Probe Research Foundation in 1980. Energy Probe has been one of the main critics of the energy industry since that time. We have opposed nuclear plants. We have opposed large hydro dams. We have opposed Arctic pipe lines and tar sands and we promote conservation and renewable energy.

FC: So why did you write the book *The Deniers*?

LS: Energy Probe has long thought that climate change could be a serious problem. We were in fact one of the first organizations in Canada, perhaps the first, to warn about the potential dangers of climate change. But over the years, the evidence that has emerged hasn't really been that strong. And scientists who have pointed out the weakness of the case for global warming, of the Al Gore view have been vilified. I became interested in knowing who these scientists were, what their views were precisely and whether they really were kooks or in the pay of the oil industry, as their critics claim. So I decided to start profiling them in my weekly column for the *National Post*. I thought I would find a few who were credible but it turns out that I found a great many who were credible.

FC: If you listen to the media dialogue it seems to be quite one-sided. Why does the media not present a more balanced view of this topic?

LS: The media believes that the science is settled. They have bought in to what Al Gore has said, that the science is settled, that there are 2500 scientists associated with the United Nations' Panel on Climate Change that all agree with the United Nations' conclusion. But the media is simply wrong. It hasn't done its homework. It hasn't contacted top scientists to find out that in fact the science is not settled. And it has not contacted the Secretariat for the UN's climate change panel, called the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). Had they done that, as I did, they would have discovered that the 2500 scientists are not endorsers of the United Nations' position. Those scientists are peer reviewers of background studies that went into the climate change documents and many of those peer reviewers don't agree with the United Nations' position.

FC: You could position your work as certainly critical of the environmental orthodoxy out there, have you been

attacked or criticized by your colleagues in the environmental movement?

LS: I haven't. I expected that I would be attacked by them but to my surprise there has been to date not one criticism that I'm aware of from any of whom I would consider an environmental colleague. There has been criticism from a global warming blog site that is backed by someone from the public relations industry but that's not an environmental criticism. Environmentalists, I believe, are torn on the issue. Many of them, I feel, are not convinced that the science is settled but they're happy to see the Kyoto-type reforms being put in place because it accomplishes what environmentalists want. They want to see less use of fossil fuels. They want to see fewer tar sands. They want to see fewer arctic pipe lines. They want to see more conservation. They want to see less use of the automobile, fewer roads, fewer suburbs and sprawl. And they think they can accomplish all those things by going along with the climate change debate whether or not the science is right. Climate change is a secondary issue.

FC: So these groups are just using this as a convenient vehicle for various agendas?

LS: Some of them are, some of them I'm sure are entirely sincere. And it's not just environmental groups. Those who find climate change convenient include groups concerned with third-world development. They'd like to see the Kyoto plan proceed because they see it as a way of transferring wealth to the third-world. It includes businesses. This is very big business now and many businesses are in the carbon trading field or think they can capitalize on it. There are literally hundreds of billions of dollars at stake here and businesses realize that. The research community has an interest. There are billions of dollars in research grants, \$4 billion a year now in research grants. There are economists who don't like the personal income tax system, the progressive income tax system and they would prefer to see a system based on commodity taxes. They see carbon as being a good way to accomplish that goal. So all the interest groups are trying to take advantage of the climate change reforms that seem to be on their way.

FC: Let's get to the heart of the matter, is carbon dioxide or CO2 and global warming a problem for us as a society and the environment?

LS: Many scientists believe that CO2 is a problem. Many others, perhaps the majority of scientists, believe that CO2 is not a problem. Many scientists believe that CO2 is actually a benefit. It wasn't actually that long ago that CO2 was universally regarded as beneficial, as plant food. CO2 is nature's fertilizer. Only recently have we started to view CO2 with suspicion in this way.

FC: Some people seem to talk about CO2 as a form of pollution. Would you agree with that?

LS: No. I think people often confuse CO2 with other types of emissions. Coal burning produces lots of emissions, it produces NOX (nitrogen oxides) and SOX (sulphur oxides), mercury emissions. Those are known to be harmful. The carbon component of coal burning is not known to be harmful. CO2 may be benign. It may be beneficial. And yet we are putting it in the same category as known poisons. Carbon after all is the building block of life on Earth. We are a carbon-based planet. There is something dangerous about attacking the basis of life on Earth.

FC: You mentioned in your speeches to the Frontier that the Earth has never been greener, that we've never had more biota. This is a very optimistic viewpoint. Yet we constantly hear Armageddon-type doom mongering about the environment.

LS: It's not an optimistic viewpoint. It's a viewpoint based on the data. Until a little while ago, we didn't have a way of measuring how planet Earth was doing on the whole. Well now we have a measure. For the last few decades we have been measuring the growth on the planet. We've been measuring the amount of greenery we have, the amount of biota we have and the data shows that the Earth is greener now than since we've begun to take these measurements. Now it's not as green as it has been in much earlier times. The Earth has been much hotter, much greener in earlier times but it's the greenest it's been in recent times. Some people see that with alarm. I don't see why we would view heat and greenery with alarm. Normally we see that as good.

FC: If CO2 has benefits why would our policy makers construct complicated schemes around reducing CO2? People don't understand how they work but cap and trade, carbon taxes, all these things.

LS: Politicians don't realize that the science is not settled on climate change. They think it's a done deal and it's inevitable that they have to take action so the question that they face is what type of action should we take? But I think they need to step back and do the science because it's not clear that there is a problem because of climate change. There may be no problem at all. It may be that we are about to enter into a cooling period. There's a great deal of science that we don't know and there's vanishingly little that we do know about the climate.

FC: So what do you say about cap and trade and carbon tax schemes? Are they good ideas or bad ideas?

LS: Premature ideas. If we had a problem with carbon then it might be sensible to have an upheaval in our economy. Then it might be sensible to increase the costs of our fuel. Then it might be sensible to increase the costs of food as

we're doing because of bio-fuels. Then it might be sensible to increase our taxes. But in the absence of information I don't think it's sensible to do these things at all. I think what we need to do is get the information because these carbon schemes not only can harm the economy, they can harm the environment as well. And in fact they are harming the environment.

FC: So you are saying that we are unnecessarily raising the costs of our lifestyle, essentially, by going down this road?

LS: Yes but I wouldn't characterize it as merely lifestyle. I would say that we are raising the costs of life. We are raising the cost of food and fuel. These are very basic to human life. They may translate to lifestyle for us in the West but for people in the third world it's much closer to life than to lifestyle. When you are living on \$1 a day and your food costs double, you are in trouble and your family is in trouble.

FC: The Feds are giving Saskatchewan \$1 billion for a carbon capture project in the oil fields. Again if CO2 is not a problem, can we say that we are essentially burying \$1 billion in the ground?

LS: Well you could say that but it could be worse than that. Because not only might you be burying \$1 billion in the ground but these carbon sequestration schemes, according to a recent study at Columbia University, could be inducing earthquakes. So we could actually be doing a great deal of harm to our cities because these carbon sequestration schemes are often located near cities.

FC: Could we also say, for example, diverting that \$1 billion into public housing, or whatever would be a better use of the resources?

LS: Certainly, putting money down a rat hole is not a good use of resources.

FC: In Manitoba we are closing a coal burning plant out by Brandon. Why is coal seen as a dirty fuel by the policy community?

LS: Coal used to be a very dirty fuel but coal has become cleaner and cleaner over the decades. Clean coal now is quite clean. Clean coal now has the same emissions profile as natural gas. Clean coal can become cleaner still. We can take even more of the pollutants out of coal and I believe we should. Clean coal, I think, is the immediate answer to Canada's energy needs and the world's energy needs. There are hundreds of years available of coal supplies. We shouldn't be squandering that resource. We should be using it prudently.

FC: You've said that Kyoto has emerged as a destroyer of the environment. Can you describe this ultimate irony? You've already mentioned bio-fuels but you had several other examples.

LS: Kyoto, through various mechanisms, acts to destroy the global environment. One of those is through carbon offsets. When we buy a carbon offset in the West what we are often doing is buying a part of a carbon sink in the third world. That carbon sink might be a fast growing eucalyptus plantation. Eucalyptus is a fast growing tree that takes a lot of carbon out of the air. To get the land for that plantation farmers in the third world are often evicted from their land

without compensation. Or an old growth forest may be converted to a eucalyptus plantation and there we lose the environmental amenities in that old-growth forest and the residents of that forest, the forest people, who make their living by collecting nuts and berries from the forest, lose their livelihood as well.

FC: What about ethanol?

LS: Ethanol is an enormous economic and environment boondoggle. It doesn't have the environmental benefits that are touted for it. In fact, some studies that air quality is worse in certain air sheds from ethanol burning. But apart from that even if you are concerned about greenhouse gases ethanol is not an answer. Ethanol increases the amount of greenhouse gases. But most damagingly, ethanol is contributing to the inflation that we're seeing in food prices and this is leading to enormous upset especially in the third world where people are now protesting, sometimes rioting, because of the effect on them and their families from the high food prices.

FC: Why are there really no political parties who strongly oppose all this policy that's emerging with Kyoto and the obsession with being green? Is it that politicians are afraid?

LS: I think it is fear. I think politicians have been cowed into backing what they think is an inevitable reform. They think that the public will accept nothing less than serious climate change reforms. That might be a carbon tax, it might be a cap and trade system, it might be different type of regulation. But politicians feel that they can't lag on this issue. I think they're wrong. I think politicians should demand a debate before they create enormous changes to Canadian society.

FC: What's your view of the "Green Shift" plan put forward by federal Liberal leader Stephane Dion, which seems to be quite ambitious?

LS: In many ways, it's not a principled plan at all. Stephane Dion is giving a pass to the car. People are not being hit at the gas pump. The reason he is giving people a pass at the gas pump is because he is afraid of the political consequences of going too far. But Stephane Dion's plan ultimately is based on ignorance. He believes that there is a consensus on climate change. He is simply wrong on that. There is no consensus on climate change. I believe that if he realized that there was no consensus and if the public realized that there was no consensus that the Liberals would not be taking the Canadian society down this road.

FC: Who will the plan impact the most?

LS: The plan initially will be affecting home owners to a great extent. The average fuel bill will be going up \$200 or \$250. But in a way, Albertans are the real target of this. This is in some way the repeat of the National Energy Program because the lion's share of the revenues will be coming from Alberta and then those will be mostly redistributed to the public at large. So Alberta is going to be victimized. The rest of the country is going to get some of Alberta's spoils. I think the country as a whole will be worst off as a result of this exercise.

FC: How will Alberta, and I assume Saskatchewan, pay more through this plan? I don't quite understand.

LS: Well under the Dion plan it's the industries that will be providing most of the revenue. Those petroleum industries are largely concentrated in Alberta and Saskatchewan.

FC: It's been curious, the response of Alberta and the oil industry. The energy industry's approach has been to lie low and hope this all goes away. What do you think of that strategy?

LS: It hasn't worked. Just the opposite. It's playing into the hands of those who would like to see them shut down. The energy industry is afraid to fight for its rights and the public senses that. What the public gets from anyone who is afraid to fight for his rights is that he's not proud of what he's doing. And if the energy industry isn't proud of what it is doing well why should other Canadians be proud of the energy industry? The actions of the energy industry, more than anything else, are acting to undermine it. It should try to make its case. Some people would criticize it and everybody should treat arguments that come from the energy industry with some skepticism. But everybody would realize that they have a right to make a case. While the public should be skeptical of energy industry facts, the onus then comes on the skeptics to disprove the energy industry facts. If the energy industry presents its facts fairly they would not be easily refuted. They have not done that and they are suffering for it. And all Canadians will be suffering for it.

FC: So if you were asked for advice by the oil industry in Alberta, what would your advice be to them?

LS: I'd say 'Come clean.' Make your best case. Challenge people to knock it down. If they can't knock it down, the Canadian people will be able to recognize that. If they can knock it down, well then you've made your case and you've lost. And you will have deserved to have lost. As it is, you're losing and it's not clear that you deserve to be losing.

FC: What about Alberta politicians? They also seem to be mumbling in their coffee and just hoping that this thing goes away.

LS: Alberta politicians, like everyone else, are cowed. They are afraid of criticism. People naturally feel guilty, there's something in human nature that makes us feel guilty. Politicians feel that they may be doing something wrong. They're not representing the interest of their province and they should be. Their province is hurting as a result and Canada will be hurting as a result because it's not clear that the CO2 emissions that we're getting, themselves, have been doing harm.

FC: Stephen Harper came out and said this is another National Energy Program but he's also been very reticent about dealing in the facts. What would you suggest to him?

LS: He needs to stand up for Canada as well. He's our Prime Minister. He should do his job. He should make sure that we have a public-spirited debate, that the facts are on the table. If he wants to do a service to Canadians, he needs to make sure that we act on the best information available. Right now we are running blind.

FC: But he seems, like other politicians, sensitive to media and pundit criticism which is quite hostile to sort of unorthodox views on this topic.

LS: That's right. And it may be that what he is doing is acting in the best interest of his Party. It may be that this is the way to get re-elected. I don't mean to suggest that I have better political advice for Stephen Harper but I do have better advice for the long-term needs of Canada. And that is that we make informed decisions about our future, not short-term decisions based on views that are entirely misguided.

FC: Where is this whole thing going? Do you think it's going to fall apart?

LS: I think it will fall apart. I hope it falls apart before too much more damage is done. To date we have not had

compelling evidence that climate change is either man-made or harmful. We are seeing a backlash in certain political jurisdictions. Case in point, England is one of the fiercest champions of the United Nations' view on climate change. The London government has already fallen, some people say, because of the position on global warming. Gordon Brown, the Prime Minister of England, seeing his job in jeopardy because of some of the climate change policies, is trying to back away. Governments are starting to realize that it's not easy to just go along with public opinion because public opinion can turn around and bite them quite quickly. That should be an object lesson to Canada's politicians as well.