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Letter from the Editor & Hometown Notes

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..... From the Editor

On November 30, 2015, the United Nations Climate Change Conference will convene for 12 short days in Paris to face the single largest challenge ever confronted by humankind.

There are many varying aspects of desired leadership in business and in government: managerial competencies, policy-making aligned with the needs of all affected stakeholders, effective communication skills, and the infusion of ethics in all forms of decision-making. None, however, command attention more than the ability to lead in a world where every eco-system is in decline and the health of the planet is dangerously threatened. It will be those leaders who understand the magnitude, science, and extreme importance of this reality who will be in the highest demand and to whom we will look, as scholar E.F. Iodice (2015) emphasizes, “to protect the progress made in human rights worldwide, to promote governance without oppression, and to advance prosperity in an equitable and sustainable manner.”

Thus, the importance of principled leadership, even if exemplified by the acts of just one nation, one business, or one individual, is critical at a time when the fragile balance of the planet’s resources is precariously threatened. We must continuously ask ourselves,

“What good is monetary wealth when the health of the planet is compromised?”

The Paris Summit will provide a rare opportunity for our leaders to convene on the world stage and engage in the open exchange of knowledge on the most pressing, moral issue of our time. This challenge involves the entire world at all levels and requires its scientific, business, and governmental communities to recognize this urgency. Already, many ambitious commitments and pledges to reduce greenhouse gas emissions have been made. A world consensus must be developed and include the implementation of new technologies, changed lifestyles, carbon taxes, or a combination thereof especially as the world faces increasing populations and rising world energy demands. As Laurent Fabius, COP21 President and Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Development remarked:

“We therefore have a historic responsibility as we are the first generation to really become aware of the problem and yet the last generation that can deal with it.”



The urgency of this matter is metaphorically underscored by a series of events which occurred during World War II on St. Matthew Island – situate off the coast of Alaska in the Bering Sea. A Coast Guard radio station was constructed and defended on this island during the length of the war:

"The weather was awful, and keeping the base supplied with food was chancy. Someone decided to stock the island with an emergency supply of food by importing and releasing twenty-nine reindeer — a number a Fish and Game biologist had calculated to be well within the island's 'carrying capacity.'

Every farmer understands carrying capacity. Graze too many cows on your pasture and pretty soon you won't have a pasture anymore (or any cows, for that matter). It is in his self-interest to keep the balance going between his herd and the rain and the grass. So long as he does, he's got a substantial source of milk and meat.

It was the same for those reindeer on St. Matthew Island. Keep the balance going between animals and the stuff they eat— lichens and willow bushes, mainly— and you've stocked the island with a bottomless meat locker. If storms kept the supply ships away, the men could shoot a reindeer for dinner.

Barged over from Nunivak Island, these twenty-nine animals found themselves in reindeer paradise — dense strands of willow bushes and vast, unbroken carpets of lichen four inches thick. There were no wolves, no bears. No predators at all, except for the men of the Coast Guard station. When the war ended, the base was shut down and the last predator left.

That same Fish and Game biologist returned to the island twelve years later and found those original 29 reindeer had become 1,350; just a little short of the number his colleagues had calculated as the island's ultimate carrying capacity. The animals were fat and seemed to be in excellent health. But he also noticed that the lichen mats were starting to look a little thin.

St. Matthew Island is so far off any beaten track he didn't return for six more years. When a Coast Guard cutter dropped him off again in the summer of 1963, as his boots hit the shore he saw reindeer tracks, reindeer droppings, and trampled willows. And everywhere he looked, wall-to-wall reindeer. In just six years those 1,350 animals had become 6,000 — far more than the island could ever hope to carry. The lichens were sparse, and large areas of tundra were bare. Not surprisingly, the animals didn't look so fat and healthy anymore. Other commitments kept him from returning for three more years. When he did, in 1966, the island he found was just about unrecognizable. The willows were gone. The last patches of lichen were gone, too, chewed down to gravel. Reindeer skeletons were scattered over the tundra. He found only 42 animals alive."

– Ray C. Anderson, "Confessions of a Radical Industrialist"

HOMETOWN NOTES:

A Global Climate Agreement and Indiana

Earth Charter Indiana has so evocatively summarized the dilemma we all face today:

“So embedded in our society is the production of greenhouse gases beyond our own lungs, so fixed is the elevated temperatures to come, it's impossible to overstate the crisis. What we know is that we stand on the absolute brink of catastrophe and it will take unprecedented global effort, collaboration, and trust to meet this disaster, avert the worst, and weather the outcomes.

At this [Paris] Conference, we are expecting world leaders to reach a binding agreement on an effective climate change response. Since this past March, several nations submitted their countries' plans to reduce greenhouse gases and avoid a 2°C rise in average global temperature. Each plan is known as an Intended Nationally Determined Contribution (INDC). Switzerland agreed to a 50% reduction in greenhouse gas production by 2030, the European Union to 40% over 1990 levels. Mexico announced that it would peak its emissions by 2026, China by 2030. The United States pledged to reduce emissions by 26-28% over 2005 levels by 2025 through a combination of actions such as the Clean Power Plan, vehicle fuel standards, energy efficiency standards, regulations on methane, and economic incentives.¹

The Clean Power Plan is a key piece of the United States' 'buy in' for this critical agreement. It allows us to not only curb emissions from new power plants, part of the plan already in effect, but to begin to cut back on emissions from existing plants. ... Indiana Governor, Mike Pence, has vowed that Indiana will not comply with our portion of this Plan, which stipulates that Indiana will reduce our carbon dioxide emissions by 20% from 2012 values by 2030. The limit for each state is tailored on the fuels used by the 2012 fleet of electric-generating plants in each state and the average CO₂ emissions produced by those power generators.

The good news is that Indiana has made progress towards this goal, the bad news is that we have the 2nd largest carbon emissions of any state. We have a long way to go. For the sake of public health, affordable energy for working families, future job opportunities, and our ability to lead our global fight for survival in Paris this year, supporting the Clean Power Plan is something Hoosiers can do right away to protect our future.

¹ For a complete listing of INDCs, see: <http://www4.unfccc.int/submissions/INDC/Submission%20Pages/submissions.aspx>