

# THE GENERATIONAL SHIFT

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My mother often tells me that young people these days have it so easy, and I have to agree. Technological advancements have changed the ways we communicate and travel. Whenever she gets the chance to tell me and my sister that we are not thankful for what people her age have done for us, I always let her know I am at least. It's not wrong to proclaim that the only reason the Canadian economy has flourished in recent decades is because our predecessors worked extremely hard at forging the economy into a system that worked. It did work, but now it does not.

The infrastructure that has enabled our cities and communities to advance their regional economies is now crumbling. Areas in towns and cities that we have invested so heavily in are now becoming uninhabitable because extreme weather events are ravaging low-lying areas. Some are saying we are now in a transition period. Young people across the country are calling for a shift away from traditional sources of revenue (conventional fuel sources) and for new investments in cleaner, less carbon intensive energy.

There are some who will say the post-World War Two economy that Canada has now has enabled us to advance our regional economies and private wealth thanks to free market capitalism. On the other hand, more socio-economic thinkers might tell you that the dependence on the extraction of conventional resources to expand our economy must stop and a transition to a less carbon intensive society is needed. These varying opinions among the electorate often make it quite difficult for civil servants to put forth a concerted effort to combat climate change. For this article's purpose, let's call the younger generation the 'new age thinkers' and the older generation the 'old age thinkers'.

In the last few years the current business environment has made it increasingly difficult for new projects to proceed without opposition, and the old age thinkers are outraged. In the last decade, environmental interest groups have become very successful at stalling major developments. The 'new age thinkers' are being labeled environmental alarmists and radicals for their interest in delaying national economic interests. But what's important to note is the fact that a select few older people are aligning themselves with the opposition. This really shows the flaws in post-World War Two economic expansion ideology. These few specific old age thinkers have realized that their practices are outdated and inherently carbon intensive. It's time to pass on the reins to the new generation, and it might happen sooner than you think.

Who hasn't been involved in the ever-changing infrastructure debate? Being a resident of the GTA, I find it frustrating that one day it seems everyone wants subways, and the next day we are all in favor of light rail. Potholes wreak havoc on automobiles and force taxpayers into unexpected costs, and inadequate sewage systems cause floods that shutdown downtown cores. The cost associated with maintaining crumbling infrastructure can be better allocated in other areas. I no longer live in Toronto, but the list keeps going and I sometimes find myself thinking there are too many problems to take on. The provincial premiers are also echoing this sentiment, facing a myriad of problems in their respective home provinces. At this year's annual Premiers Conference (aka Council of the Federation) Allison Redford, Alberta's premier, called on the federal government to set aside funds for a disaster mitigation program that would work in conjunction with the provincial governments. The disaster-mitigation infrastructure initiative would be cost shared between the provincial governments and the federal government 50-50. Although the federal government does not take an active role at the Council of Federation meetings, it would be unwise to not take these matters seriously. Old age thinkers are now realizing that the areas prone to flooding and fire are dampening our GDP prospects and exacting a huge cost on our regional economies with payouts from insurance companies.

According to CBC News, TD Bank expects significant losses in its insurance business as a result of recent environmental events. The bank said it is going to take a pre-tax loss of \$418 million "from a combination of severe weather-related impact and increased general insurance claims" in the current quarter, which has seen abnormally high flood levels in two of Canada's largest cities, Calgary and Toronto.

But who am I to bring up these issues? Me, I'm just one of the rank and file in this generational shift. There are a lot of young people right now across the country with great ideas who are frustrated with the direction Canada is moving in. The transition can only be accomplished if the right individuals take action on specific issues that are threatening the survival of our descendants. Low lying coastal areas are being engulfed by water as sea levels rise, floods are ravaging provincial capitals and decimating towns downstream. Major weather events will only increase in frequency unless we stop relying on the carbon intensive products that we have relied on for decades. Although our progress here at home can seem minuscule on a global scale, that's not important. Canada needs to start setting an example internationally about how we feel about our natural environment and the type of economy we are going to be passing *on to our descendants*.

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