



RNDM Earth Community

“We are One, We are Love”

September, 2010

“Let ours be a time remembered for awakening a new respect for our earth and all her inhabitants, for one another, for ourselves and for our common destiny.” (RNDM Congregational Chapter, 2008)

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GUEST CONTRIBUTOR

Kaitlin Alexander was invited to write this piece to address questions like “How do we know what to believe about climate change?” and “What can we do?” At age 18, hers is a voice from the generation just entering adulthood. It is already clear that Kaitlin is someone who ‘walks her talk.’ She has her own website on climate change, presented at the Powershift Conference on climate change in Ottawa last year, has successfully lobbied the Louis Riel School Division to implement a composting program in their schools, and has been awarded the YMCA/YWCA Women of Distinction – “Gerrie Hammond Memorial Award of Promise”. She is a first-year student at the University of Manitoba and an aspiring climatologist. Our Earth has a true friend in Kaitlin.

Don't Listen to the Newspapers

If you're confused about climate change, the mainstream media may make it worse – not better.

The mainstream media portrays the existence of human-caused climate change as a much fiercer scientific debate than it actually is. Scientists are still working out the details of how much warming we can expect, how it will be distributed, and what the consequences will be. However, the “big questions” have very solid answers. The idea that emissions of carbon dioxide from human activities would eventually warm the

planet was first proposed in 1896, and since then, agreement on the issue has grown to a staggering level. 97.6% of publishing climatologists¹, 100% of studies in scientific journals², and every scientific organization in the world now agree that humans are changing the climate.

Compare this to the media coverage of climate change. The majority of articles in respected newspapers like *The New York Times* or *The Wall Street Journal* give roughly equal time to the “two sides” of the so-called “scientific debate”³. Balance in journalism is all very well when the issue is one of political or social nature, but for matters of science, giving fringe opinions the same weight as a robust consensus is misleading. Being objective is not always the same as being neutral.

Over the past year, climate change reporting has taken a disturbing turn, as attacks on the integrity of individual scientists have been spread by nearly every media outlet in the developed world. Private correspondence taken out of context (in which the scientists involved have subsequently been cleared of any wrongdoing by five independent investigations) as well as minor referencing errors in a scientific report (the worst of which gave the wrong date for when a specific glacier was expected to melt) led to widespread accusations of fraud and conspiracy by advocacy groups opposed to climate change action. Rather than investigate these potentially libellous claims, the media repeated them. As a result, many scientists have received death threats, and countless others have been subjected to hate mail. One scientist has had a dead animal dumped on his doorstep, and now travels with a bodyguard. Although their scientific reputations have not been damaged, the personal lives of these innocent men and women have been forever altered.

As the popular press reinforces myths and misconceptions about climate change, public understanding of the issue has fallen apart. Only 61% of American adults think that the Earth is warming, and only 50% think that it is caused by human activity (up-to-date Canadian statistics are not available). Most worryingly, only 34% are aware that most scientists think climate change is happening.⁴

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A vast chasm has opened between scientific and public understanding of climate change, and powerful forces are at work to keep it open.

As we live in a democracy, action on climate change will only happen when voters demand it – and they won't demand a solution if they don't understand the problem. The best thing that you and I can do to stop climate change is to spread accurate information. Scientific reports are often too technical for easy understanding, but major journals, such as *Nature*, often have a news section where they summarize new studies for the public (www.nature.com/news). Many scientists are stepping up to the challenge of climate change communication, and casting light on common misconceptions. A website called Skeptical Science is one of the best sources (www.skepticalscience.com/argument.php.)

There are many people working to fix this problem, but we need many more. Slowly but surely, the tide will turn.

1. "Examining the Scientific Consensus on Climate Change", by P. Doran and M. Zimmerman, 2009, *EOS*, 90(3): 22-23.

2. "Beyond the Ivory Tower: The Scientific Consensus on Climate Change", by N. Oreskes, 2004, *Science*, 306(5702): 1686.

3. "Balance as bias: Global warming and the US prestige press", by M. Boykoff and J. Boykoff, 2004, *Global Environmental Change*, 14: 125-136

4. "Climate Change in the American Mind: Americans' Global Warming Beliefs and Attitudes in June 2010", by the Yale Project on Climate Change Communication, 2010.

Read more of Kaitlin Alexander's articles at her website, www.climatesight.org

DID YOU KNOW?

Since the mid 1800s when record-keeping started, 2000-2009 was the warmest decade on record. (NASA GISS data)



BUILDING PROJECT UPDATE . . .

The new closing date for the sale of the land is now September 30th – and we are hopeful it will be then or shortly after. Many of you have given us suggestions for the new building, and we are most appreciative. Please continue to think about what you believe would be important to include in the building, and to imagine possibilities for its construction.

TIPS FOR GREEN LIVING



Pledge to Care for the Earth

1. Install at least one energy-saving light bulb in your home and/or workplace.
2. Trade one driving day per week with car-pooling, using public transit, biking or walking.
3. Plant a native perennial or tree to preserve biodiversity and provide habitat for wildlife.
4. Replace one meat meal with vegetarian food.
5. Move your thermostat down by 2 degrees in winter and up by 2 degrees in summer.
6. Buy at least 10 percent of your groceries from local farmers - organic, when possible.
7. Buy at least one container of environmentally-friendly dishwashing liquid.
8. Purchase at least one fair-trade item.

If any of these articles have stirred a response in you, please share your insight at GreenSistersTalk@yahoo.ca