

Question of the Week

Do you plan to vote in the upcoming municipal election? Why or why not?

"Yes. Voting is important to pick the right person to help the community and economy. To help people, basically." – Shirley Willan, Essex

"Probably not. I just can't be bothered with it, really." – Amy Correia, Essex

"Yes. I already have signs up. My wife and I are retired and we take an active interest in municipal politics." – Stan Weglarz, Essex

Next week's question:

In your opinion, should elected officials and town employees have credit card privileges? Why or why not?

A letter to the editor is not necessary. Simply **CALL DAN at 519-776-4268, ext. 13** to leave your response. You must provide your name and phone number.

You can also drop us an email at **essexfreepress@on.aibn.com** or **FAX us at 519-776-4014**.

Please be brief – 25 to 40 words. Deadline for responses: Monday at 9 a.m.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

I am writing to address issues raised in the media in regards to my reported absence from the Sept. 21 meeting to discuss Ford's announced intention to close the Essex engine plant. I have provided some facts and comments below which I trust will put to rest any suggestion of disinterest on my part.

Post election 2006, I was appointed chair of the government auto caucus by the Minister of Industry. I take the responsibility and duties of this chairmanship very seriously.

At 8:00 a.m. on Thursday, Sept. 21, I was chairing a meeting in Ottawa with the Minister of Industry and the government auto caucus, which my office had been instrumental in arranging. This meeting, the first of what will be a series of pre-budget consultations with ministers to discuss measures to foster an economic climate favourable to the automotive sector, had been arranged in mid-summer and timed for the opening week of Parliament.

As to the mayor's meeting, I was not consulted as to my availability before the notice of meeting was issued. Had he known, I am sure Windsor Mayor Eddie Francis would have agreed as to the importance of my meeting with Minister Bernier and been willing to reconsider his own meeting date.

When my senior constituency assistant called to give my regrets, she was not advised that a staff member could attend in my stead. Had that offer been extended, I would most certainly have sent a representative. But I wonder would the byline the next day have been, "Watson doesn't think the meeting is important – sends staff instead".

Subsequently, I did make contact with Local 200 President Mike Vince, and asked to meet with him last weekend to be more fully briefed. Unfortunately, we were not able to arrange a suitable time.

On the Friday morning Ford made their announced lay-offs, I spent 40 minutes on the telephone with Ford

officials asking what I or my government could do to alter this course of action. In a nutshell, I was told that "product had not performed well in the market" and that there was "nothing I or our government could do". When I asked, I was assured that the Windsor engine plant and Nemak facilities were not at risk for closure. These intentions need to be and will be followed up by me.

Last spring I arranged a meeting between CAW officials and the government auto caucus in conjunction with a report the CAW was planning to table that week on trade talks with the Republic of South Korea. The CAW cancelled that meeting but committed to getting back to me to arrange an alternate date this fall. I also offered to meet personally with Buzz Hargrove, but he declined the invitation. More recently, Paul Forder, government relations director for the CAW, and I shared a flight. He asked for my assistance in setting up a meeting on the Hill, which I am happy

to oblige. I am contacted regularly by industry officials. I very much appreciate every opportunity this contact affords me to be better informed so that I can in turn best advance the interests of an industry that is crucial to the well-being of our region.

In the same vein, I would welcome the opportunity to build a solid working relationship with union officials to ensure that the interests of workers are front and centre in all discussions to promote the long-term viability of the industry. Indeed, in the face of low labour costs in emerging markets our highly skilled labour force is key to maintaining our edge in a very competitive, global market.

In closing, I would like to say that I am proud of my credentials as an autoworker and CAW member and welcome every opportunity to use them to serve the interests of workers in the automotive sector.

Jeff Watson, MP
Essex

Climate: A Stitch in Time...

By Gwynne Dyer

It's a law of physics that translates well into the behaviour of human beings: the greater the mass involved, the more effort is needed to overcome its inertia. But it doesn't read very well as an epitaph for civilization.

The information we need in order to act is around us every day. Three small, low-key stories in the inner pages of the newspapers I read at breakfast this morning -- the sort of stories you find in the media almost every day -- should have been enough to galvanize every reader into instant action. But the human version of the laws of physics gets in the way.

The first story was a warning by the Meteorological Office in Britain that summer temperatures in south-eastern England may reach as high as 46 degrees C (115 F) by the end of this century. "By 2100, such heatwaves are likely to occur almost every year, and could occur several times in any given summer," said the Met Office.

London with the summer temperatures similar to Kuwait's seems incredible, but the Met Office was relentlessly reasonable. Depending on how fast greenhouse gas emissions rise, it pointed out, we are facing an average rise in global temperature of between two and five degrees Celsius (4.5 and 11 degrees F) by the end of this century.

If the atmospheric concentration of carbon dioxide is halted at the level of 450 parts per million, then we get away with "only" two degrees hotter. But we are already at 385 ppm, so that

requires immediate global agreement on radical action to curb the growth of CO₂ emissions. Allow the current model of economic development and energy use to continue basically unchanged, and you end up with 800 ppm by the end of the century and the five degrees hotter world.

Except -- and the Met Office didn't say this part -- that you never get there, because global civilization falls into violent chaos as huge numbers of people start to starve. Even two degrees hotter will reduce agricultural output in the main food-producing regions of the world by about a quarter.

Much hotter, and it will be much worse, so we may end up negotiating (or more likely, fighting) over which billion of us starve first. Intelligent human beings, faced with that prospect, would act at once, or so you would think -- especially because the actions required are not really all that painful, provided that they start right away.

The second story in this morning's papers was about a "green growth plus" strategy devised by consultants at PricewaterhouseCoopers, the US-based giant that provides a wide range of business services including risk management. Basically, the report said that it wouldn't cost all that much to save civilization.

The economists at PricewaterhouseCoopers calculated that serious efforts to improve energy efficiency, greater

use of renewable energy, and new technologies for carbon capture could cut global CO₂ emissions by about 60 percent from the level predicted for 2050 if countries just pursue a "business-as-usual approach." Moreover, the costs involved would not beggar us all.

"Estimates suggest that the level of (world Gross Domestic Product) might be reduced by no more than two to three percent by 2050 if this strategy is followed," said John Hawksorth, head of macro-economics at PwC. But the success of the strategy does depend on getting really serious about global heating RIGHT NOW.

Is that really likely to happen? The third story in this morning's paper seemed encouraging at first, for it reported that scientists now believe the battle to close the "ozone hole" is being won.

It is an impressive tale of global cooperation to stop human activities that damage vital natural systems. The ozone hole was first spotted in 1985, and soon researchers linked it conclusively with chlorofluorocarbons, compounds that were widely used in refrigerators, air-conditioners and aerosol sprays.

Every Antarctic spring, the CFCs in the upper atmosphere were interacting with the returning sunlight to destroy the ozone that protects living things from the sun's ultraviolet radiation. The predicted consequences included blind penguins, sunburned fish, and a

soaring rate of skin cancer among people living at high latitudes.

However, the Montreal Protocol of 1987 restricted the production of CFCs only two years after the hole was discovered. The Antarctic hole still covered an area bigger than all of North America this month, but scientists are now confident that the worst is past. It will stay at about this size for fifteen or twenty years, and then "somewhere between 2020 and 2025 we'll be able to detect that the ozone hole is actually beginning to decrease in size," said Paul Newman of NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center in Maryland. Within seventy years, the hole should be entirely healed.

So why can't we react as fast to global warming? Because of inertia: the mass of people and institutions to be moved is just so great.

Fixing the ozone hole was easy because neither hair-spray nor refrigerator coolants are centrally important in the economy. Changing the way we produce and use energy is not easy at all, even if PricewaterhouseCoopers are right and the ultimate level of economic sacrifice would not be that great. So many people and institutions are involved that it's hard to move fast, even if failing to do so costs us the Earth.

Gwynne Dyer is a Canadian journalist, syndicated columnist and military analyst who has written on international affairs for more than 20 years.