

A call for a new Northern vision

In Ottawa on April 20, former Prime Minister Brian Mulroney was named Canada's greenest prime minister by a jury of 12 environmental activists selected by *Corporate Knights* magazine. Accepting the award, Mulroney not only looked back on his government's achievements on the environment but looked ahead to the compelling challenges of climate change, particularly as they affect the Arctic, where the melting of the ice cap poses huge issues of sustainable development, as well as implications for Canada's claims of Arctic sovereignty. Here are excerpts from Mulroney's call for a new Northern vision.

À Ottawa, le 20 avril dernier, Brian Mulroney a été nommé le premier ministre le plus écologiste de l'histoire du Canada par un jury de 12 militants écologistes désignés par le magazine *Corporate Knights*. En acceptant cette distinction, M. Mulroney a évoqué les réalisations de son gouvernement ainsi que les immenses défis soulevés par le réchauffement planétaire, dans l'Arctique notamment, où la fonte de la calotte glaciaire pose de graves problèmes liés au développement durable et à la souveraineté du Canada dans cette région. Voici des extraits de la mise en garde de l'ancien premier ministre, qui en appelle à une nouvelle « Vision nordique ».

When I was very young, we went to the foot of Champlain Street and swam in Baie Comeau, for which my hometown was named.

Today, there is a park where we used to swim. The effluence from the paper mill created landfill, where once there had been pristine waters. Nobody swims in the bay anymore.

And that's where my awareness of the environment, and of environmental degradation, began. We've seen too many such sights in this country, including company towns carved out of the wilderness, with little regard for the impact on their surroundings. In fairness, it should be noted that in those days few of us knew any better. Now we do.

We need to learn those lessons of careless development, and of neglecting to clean up after ourselves. We need to learn it especially in the North. The future of this country is going north, and it is time for a new Northern vision, one of sustainable development that preserves the Arctic wilderness, protects wildlife and sustains a way of life for our indigenous peoples.

In Baie Comeau, I once said: "My father dreamed of a better life for his family. I dream of a better life for my country." Part of that dream was about leaving a more prosperous and united country to our children, but a large part of it was also about leaving our munificent country environmentally whole.

This award by a group of environment leaders, as Canada's greenest prime minister, is deeply gratifying. I thank the panel and accept not only on my own behalf, but on behalf of all who served in our government between 1984 and 1993.

I was extremely fortunate in having some outstanding environment ministers including Tom McMillan, Lucien Bouchard, Robert de Cotret and Jean Charest. I thank them all for their diligence and devotion on behalf of the environment, and gratefully acknowledge their leadership.

Under Tom McMillan, we negotiated the Montreal Protocol in 1987, which redressed depletion of the ozone layer; in 1988 we were the first Western government to endorse the recommendations of the Brundtland Commission and the first to embrace the language of "sustainable development."

Lucien Bouchard was the first environment minister to serve on the influential Planning and Priorities Committee of cabinet, and under his strong direction Canada devised the Green Plan with compulsory environmental review of all government initiatives. This plan was described by Dr. Mostafa Tolba, director of the United Nations Environment Program, as "a model for the world."

Under Robert de Cotret, the Green Plan became the standard for environmental policy, and we completed the work that began the day we took office when we signed the Acid Rain Accord with the United States in 1991.

Under Jean Charest's inspired leadership, at the Rio Conference in 1992, we helped bring the United States on board in support of the Convention on Climate Change, and we were the first industrialized nation to sign on to the Bio-Diversity Accord. Canada's international identity was strongly affirmed as a result of the brilliant contribution of Jean Charest at this seminal conference.

We established eight new national parks, including South Moresby in British Columbia, and under the Green

Plan put Canada on a path to create 5 more by 1996 and another 13 by 2000, bringing the national parks system begun by Sir John A. Macdonald, with the creation of Banff National Park in 1885, closer to completion.

We began the long-overdue clean-up of the Great Lakes, St. Lawrence and Fraser rivers, and we launched an Arctic Strategy seeking to protect our greatest and most fragile wilderness area — the North. And we created the National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy, recognizing that sustainable development requires the participation and leadership of the private sector.

The most compelling environmental challenge facing the world today is global warming. In Toronto in 1988, we hosted the first international scientific conference on climate change. The scientists gathered there told us in clear, unambiguous language the nature of the challenge we were facing. In their consensus statement, they concluded: “Humanity is conducting an unintended, uncontrolled, globally pervasive experiment, whose ultimate consequences are second only to global nuclear war.”

If global warming is not arrested, climate change may be irreversible. In the fall of 2005, we witnessed the perfect storms of global warming — the hurricanes that slammed the Gulf Coast, incubated in the warm waters of the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean. The trends are clear — more Category 4 and 5 hurricanes, higher storm surges, serious loss of forests to pine beetles as in British Columbia, earlier spring, hotter summers and warmer winters.

In the Arctic, we are witnessing the shrinking of the polar ice cap. The polar bear, the very symbol of the Canadian North, may soon be an endangered species. It stands to reason, if the ice is melting, it has nowhere to go, and no ability to feed itself.

From my own experience, I would offer two observations on addressing environmental issues.

First, it doesn't really matter what the process is, so long as the problem is addressed by leadership. Where political will prevails, solutions will follow.

And second, there are few durable solutions on the environment, or on any other international issue, without the engagement of the United States and the leadership of its president.

So whether the process proves to be Kyoto, or something else, let's acknowledge the urgency of global warming. And then let's get the United States to the table. It isn't by lecturing the Americans on their record on emissions reduction that we'll succeed, especially when our own record is nearly twice as bad as theirs.

In 1990, our government committed Canada to keeping greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions to 1990 levels. In spite of signing the Kyoto Accord, which commits us to reducing emissions to 6 percent below 1990 levels by the period 2008 to 2012, Canada's emissions have increased by 24 percent, as opposed to a 13 percent increase by the United States, which has declined to sign Kyoto. Simply put, we are in no position to be moralizing with the US or anyone else. We don't have the high ground.

Kyoto alone is no panacea. China and India are two awakening industrial giants. While China and India are both parties to Kyoto, neither was asked to take on targets in the first commitment period, 2008 to 2012. How they will engage in the post-2012 regime and whether they will take on binding targets is a huge and pressing challenge.

Whether in the Kyoto framework, or by some other means, Canada must begin reducing its own GHG emissions.

Furthermore, there is no solution to the issue of global warming without the participation of business and industry in Canada and around the world.

Let me offer two examples, again from my own experience.

In 1987, when we signed the Montreal Protocol, we made it very

clear to DuPont, the largest manufacturer of CFCs, that there was no turning back from our resolve to eliminate these dangerous ozone-depleting substances. DuPont responded to the challenge by creating innovative technologies that have only made the company more profitable, as well as a world leader in environmental responsibility.

When we negotiated acid rain agreements with seven provinces from Manitoba to Newfoundland and Labrador, we agreed on a binding 50 percent reduction of sulphur dioxide emissions that caused acid rain. At the time, Inco's smelter in Sudbury was the largest single emitter of SO₂ in the world. The company claimed our targets would bankrupt them.

But we held firm and ultimately new technology captured the sulphur before it was pumped into the sky and carried by prevailing winds to kill forests, lakes and streams.

Far from going bankrupt, the company became more profitable on the sale of captured sulphur.

Then once we were getting our own house in order, we had the moral high ground with the United States. I was able to say in my address to the joint session of Congress in 1988 that we were reducing our emissions by 50 percent, adding: “We ask nothing more than this from you.” I also asked them: “What would be said of a generation of Americans and Canadians who found a way to explore the stars, but allowed their lakes and forests and streams to languish and die?”

There are many examples of corporate success stories today on the issue of adapting to climate change. Abitibi in forest products and Alcan in metals have met the challenge of sustainable development. By 2004, Abitibi reduced GHG emissions to 37 percent below 1990 levels. Alcan, operating at 430 sites in 40 countries, has reduced emissions by 3.5 million tonnes since 2001. Dozens of global corporations have met and exceeded emissions reductions



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targets, and met them years ahead of schedule. In most instances, emissions reductions increase profitability.

Not only is it the right thing to do, it's good business. And it's good for business. Consumers have a choice. They can vote with their wallets to reward responsible corporations for sustainable development. They can buy shares in environmentally responsible companies, either as individual or group investors. And so they should.

So there are three elements to Canada playing an important role on the environment: First, leading by example, claiming the high ground. Second, engaging the Americans, and at the highest level of government. Third, involving industry in solutions.

Let me illustrate with the example of acid rain, which I raised with President Reagan on my first visit to the White House when I was still leader of the opposition in June 1984.

In March 1985, at the Shamrock Summit, he agreed to the appointment of special envoys, Drew Lewis and Bill Davis, who reported directly to us.

Frank Carlucci, President Reagan's national security adviser, describes how testy Reagan became when his officials continued to stall and stymie my government on issues ranging from acid rain to Arctic sovereignty to free trade. According to a recent account published by Professor Jeffrey L. Chidester, research director for presidential and special projects at the University of Virginia, before entering 24 Sussex, Reagan took Carlucci aside and said: "I think we should do something for Brian." Carlucci said: "Mr. President, we're doing well holding our positions on acid rain, the Free Trade Agreement and the Northwest Passage." "Oh, no, no, no," said Reagan. "We ought to do something."

After lunch, Carlucci continued to push for the American position. "I said [to the President], 'No, no, we're holding to our positions. These are well established positions.' It was the only time I saw Ronald Reagan lose his temper. He turned to me and said: 'You do it.'"

Carlucci went right from the meeting and grabbed Derek Burney, [my] chief of staff and asked: "Derek, would you reiterate your positions [on acid rain, trade and the Northwest Passage]?" When Burney asked why, Carlucci said: "Because they're now our positions."

Immediately after that exchange President Reagan sat with his cabinet officials and senior advisers behind closed doors in the living room at 24 Sussex and amended his speech to Parliament slated for that afternoon.

He wrote that he "agreed to consider" a bilateral agreement with Canada over acid rain and added a promise "to inject new impetus" into talks regarding recognition of Canadian sovereignty over the Arctic.

In 1991, we signed the Acid Rain Accord with the first President Bush. Both President Reagan and President Bush rejected the advice of their officials on acid rain, because of the special relationship between the United States and Canada, and the personal rapport between president and prime minister.

Prime Minister Harper is off to a very good start in managing this challenging and sensitive file.

The golden rule of Canada-US relations is very simple. And the prime minister has put it very well: "We can disagree without being disagreeable." For as the prime minister has also said: "The Americans are very important to us. We know they are, notwithstanding the differences, our best ally, our closest neighbour, our biggest customer."

There is also a rule of global politics — Canada's influence in the world is measured to a significant degree by the extent to which we are perceived as having real influence in Washington. For the past decade and more, as many experts have observed, Canada allowed that clout to erode.

Prime Minister Harper intends to begin anew. As he has already demonstrated, Ottawa doesn't have to go along with Washington in order to get along with the United States. This approach is

bound to produce positive results and advance the national interest.

Which brings me to the main point I want to leave with you — the Arctic. Canada is one of only three nations on earth that front on three oceans — the Atlantic, the Pacific and the Arctic. From sea, to sea, to sea, we have the longest coastline of any country in the world.

Inuit have lived in the Arctic for centuries, yet most Canadians have never been to this vast and magnificent region of Canada that is central to our national identity, to our sense of country and to our territorial sovereignty.

There are three issues looming large before us — the melting of Arctic sea ice and the opening of Arctic waters to navigation; the sustainable development of northern resources, particularly those beneath the melting sea ice; and the enforcement of our Arctic sovereignty with the cooperation of the other circumpolar states, notably the United States and Russia.

In 1979, the year NASA space images started measuring minimum concentrations of Arctic sea ice, you could have travelled by dogsled in summer, following the midnight sun from Siberia, across the Canadian Arctic to Greenland. But polar ice has been shrinking at a rate of nearly 75,000 square kilometres annually over the last 30 years. As the *Ottawa Citizen* has reported: "That means enough ice to cover Lake Superior vanishes every year."

The melting of the polar ice cap and the permafrost is the result of global warming caused by human activity over the last half century.

Ironically, these environmental challenges are also creating immense economic opportunity. For centuries, explorers from Baffin and Munk to Parry and Franklin have tried to find a way through the Northwest Passage. All failed, and some perished, in search of the Arctic grail.

Now, as the ice melts, the Northwest Passage may be open for navigation as early as 2020, realizing the centuries-old dream of a commercial

passage from Europe to Asia, one much shorter than the route through the Panama Canal and able to accommodate much larger ships. But with the prospect of navigation goes the possibility of oil spills and introduction of exotic species in Arctic waters.

And then there is all that Arctic oil and gas, much of it still locked beneath the ice. The proven reserves of Arctic petroleum are measured in the billions of barrels of oil and trillions of cubic feet of natural gas.

Drilling for it in a sustainable manner is one environmental challenge; building pipelines or ports to transport it is another. As the *New York Times* noted in a page 1 headline last year: “As Polar Ice Turns to Water, Dreams of Treasure Abound.” The *Times* added, “The Arctic Ocean may become the next, and likely the last of our great oceans to exploit, conserve and protect.”

No nation, acting alone, can protect the Arctic. But the circumpolar nations, acting together, can and must. Territorial disputes do nothing to resolve the larger issue of the Arctic as the greatest wilderness region on earth, one shared by all northern nations.

Other Arctic nations have challenged our Arctic sovereignty in the past, and such challenges will only increase with the opening of the Northwest Passage, and the exploitation of our northern petroleum reserves.

Canada regards the Northwest Passage as internal waters. The United States regards it as the high seas. In 1986, the US Coast Guard icebreaker the *Polar Sea* sailed through it without seeking our permission. When President Reagan visited Ottawa in 1987, I showed him the Northwest Passage on an antique globe in my office and told him bluntly, “Ron, that’s ours.” Later, after a working lunch at 24 Sussex, he raised it with his own officials, and as I noted earlier, instructed them to make reference to our position in his speech to Parliament. This was followed by an agreement between the two govern-



Jake Wright

Former Prime Minister Brian Mulroney at an Earth Week gala honouring him as Canada’s greenest PM: “There are three elements to Canada playing an important role on the environment,” he said. “First, leading by example, claiming the high ground. Second, engaging the Americans, and at the highest level of government. Third, involving industry in solutions.”

ments. It is in such a succession of small victories that Canada can assert its territorial and political sovereignty in the North.

I congratulate Prime Minister Harper for the bold and imaginative plan he outlined in the campaign to assert and enhance our sovereignty in the Arctic regions. His plan for icebreakers, increased air surveillance and

basing forces in the Arctic will give substance and credibility to our claim to what is ours.

Then it is up to all of us as Canadians to cherish this northern heritage, and to realize a new Northern vision for a new century.

Brian Mulroney was prime minister of Canada from 1984 to 1993.