

## Pembina Climate Summit Draws Hundreds

I bet some of you would be skeptical a year or two ago if I told you the 2016 Alberta Climate Summit would be oversold. After all this is Alberta, home to oil sands, low taxes, and climate change deniers. But, what a difference a year can make. Add new provincial and federal governments, an agreement in Paris, and a sense of urgency due to widespread job loss in the oil and gas industry, and all of a sudden climate change is a hot button topic. On September 20 at 8:30am, organizers of the Summit were greeted by a standing-room only crowd, swelled by over 100 unexpected attendees. The Summit made the news and #ABClimate was trending on Twitter, second only to #Brangelina (nothing can top a celebrity divorce!).

Presenters in the morning included Environment and Parks Minister Shannon Phillips, Eriel Deranger of the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation, Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change author John Stone, Mark Brownstein from the Environmental Defense Fund, to name a few. Two “fireside” panel discussions focused on first, how firms are responding to carbon constraints and second, on the role of fossil fuels in 2050. Participants attended one of four breakout sessions in the afternoon: international trends for coal; energy efficiency; utility scale renewables; and community-owned renewables. Here are some highlights from Twitter:

Let’s not forget though, it still is Calgary: one panel discussion was sponsored by Suncor and Shell, and expensive tickets meant that the business world still dominated the audience. Entrepreneurialism was a major theme. In the Utility-Scale Renewables breakout session I attended, the technical jargon around markets, investment, and electricity was enough to make my head swim. This is not to say those are bad conversations, but only that the mindset is one primarily of profit, capitalism, and resource exploitation.

This mindset is seldom questioned, despite its contribution to numerous global problems such as inequality, marginalization of poor communities, land use challenges, and biodiversity loss. I had the opportunity to raise this perspective with David Hone, Climate Change Advisor for Shell, at a breakfast presentation the day prior, by asking, “your scenarios are based on an assumption that our economic paradigm – global economic growth – will remain into the future, but do you believe there needs to be fundamental, significant changes in our economy to achieve ambitious targets like the Paris Agreement?” I think his response suggested that past assumptions about what economic paradigm should guide our actions on this planet are not changing in the business world.

Some conservation interests were represented in the audience, such as Alberta Ecotrust and the Miistakis Institute. Coffee-break discussions centred on oppor-

tunities to use existing disturbances to the land for renewable energy development (such as the SunMine solar farm in Kimberley B.C. that is located on a former mining site), formulate an energy efficiency policy, and use small-scale, community owned renewable in our cities where the load is highest. These ongoing questions should be an immediate focus in planning for a zero net-carbon future. It’s all of our work, alongside government, industry, and landowners, to find out how to enable a renewable energy sector in the abundant opportunity we have in southern Alberta without compromising wildlife and the last remaining native grassland and parkland habitats.

Two high-school students spoke the closing words. One told the audience that her grandfather recently died in Africa not from old age, but from a snake bite. Due to warmer temperatures, African snakes are moving into homes to stay cool. She emphasized – “African snakes are too hot.” Climate change is not a problem that can be put off until next decade. The same student urged the conference to do something positive for their communities, and this will create a ripple effect of resiliency across the province, the country, and ultimately the world. Starting the conversations at the Pembina Climate Summit was a first step in achieving this.

- Andrea Johancsik

