

## CLIMATE TALK

### **A Father-Son Dialog in 2036**

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After great effort over the last 20 years, since 2016, the nations of the world have reduced the annual carbon dioxide emissions to the point that atmospheric carbon dioxide is now reduced to 350 parts per million. But not before considerable damage has been done to the world's climate and ecosystems. At the climate conference in 2015 the nations of the world set a goal of a global temperature rise of no more than two degrees Celsius. But it takes time for the climate to respond after actions are taken and the global temperature rise has extracted a toll.

So now in 2036 Ashland's climate is about what it was in central Illinois in 2016 –

- over 25 days a year when the maximum temperature exceeds 90 degrees;
- a frightening collapse of our cold water fish populations, such as brook and rainbow trout;
- increasing frequency and intensity of rain storms increasing erosion rates of our clay soils regularly turning our bay waters red;
- with our storm water management systems designs based on past precipitation patterns, taxpayers have spent millions replacing systems to accommodate the more frequent and intense rainfall events;
- changes in temperature and precipitation have altered our growing seasons, lowering crop yields and our dairy production while increasing weed and pest infestations;
- tree species that grew at the edge of their ranges, such as White Birch, Jack Pine and boreal species, have now been pushed out of the state; and,
- without reliable snow and freezing temperatures, our winter tourism economy is only a fraction of what it once was. The ice caves formations haven't occurred for over a decade.

Here is a conversation between Joe and his teenage son Joe Jr. in 2036:

Joe Jr.: *Dad, I've learned that summers weren't so miserably hot 20 years ago and that cars could actually drive across the ice from Bayfield to Madeline Island in the winter.*

Joe: That's true son.

Joe Jr.: *It seems like the Chequamegon Bay area was a more pleasant place to live then.*

Joe: Well, many of us who were around then believed that.

Joe Jr.: *I've also learned that the overwhelming consensus of climate scientists had been warning for decades before that that the world had to be burning less fossil fuels if we were to avoid serious changes to the world's climate.*

Joe: That's also true.

Joe Jr.: *Well, why didn't your generation do something to burn fewer fossil fuels and thereby put less carbon dioxide into the atmosphere?*

Joe: There were many of us who wanted to do that but the majority in our congress at the time had been bought off by billionaires who had made their money by extracting, refining or transporting oil and gas – people such as the Koch brothers.

Joe Jr.: *Who were the Koch brothers?*

Joe: Well, there were four brother who were the sons of a Texas oil man who made a lot of money building oil refineries for Hitler and Stalin in the 1930s. But it was just two of them, Charles and David, who built up the company they called Koch Industries who spent the most money to influence politicians – and they were largely successful. These two were the ones generally known as “The Koch Brothers” and they were each worth over 42 billion dollars in 2016. They and their allies boasted that they would spend 889 million dollars influencing politicians in the 2016 elections. The politicians who they helped had to agree to say that global climate change was not a serious problem and was not caused by human activity. This in spite of the nearly complete consensus of climate scientists that global climate change was indeed a serious and was caused by human activity – namely the emission of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gasses into the atmosphere.

Joe Jr.: *Gee Dad, I'm sure glad that most of our politicians today don't spout that kind of nonsense.*

Joe: Well, in 2016 there was a growing awareness among the electorate that money was greatly corrupting our government-- thanks partly to a senator running for president named Bernie Sanders – and folks started electing politicians who had the integrity to do what was good for ALL the people and not just for the rich people who funded their campaigns.

Joe Jr.: *Didn't folks understand what greenhouse gasses such as carbon dioxide were doing to our climate?*

Joe: Many of those folks who were making billions extracting, refining and transporting fossil fuels were very smart about getting the public policies that they desired. They knew that they had to not just directly influence the politicians by helping them get elected or re-elected, but they also had to shape public opinion by controlling what people read in newspapers, heard on the radio, saw on television and on internet media.

David and Charles Koch funneled probably hundreds of millions of dollars to climate-denial front groups who worked to end or delay regulations and laws that were aimed at stopping or ameliorating

global warming and to convince Americans that global warming was not a serious problem. The idea and practice of “manufacturing consent” through controlling the media was developed after World War 1 and has been used quite successfully by the “*powers that be*” for most of the time since then to get the government to take actions that would increase their wealth and power rather than what is in the best interests of ALL the people.

That's why you need to get a good education and develop your critical thinking skills so that you can separate the truth from pervasive propaganda.

Joe Jr.: O.K. Dad. Now I'm motivated more than ever to learn how to separate the truth from propaganda.

Joe: That's my boy.

David Emch is a retired teacher who now lives in Washburn.