

Beep beep! Buddy, pay attention

DAVID FLEWELLING

Anyone can walk into an electronics store and, for as little as \$500, walk out with a DVD player — not for the living room or study but for the car dashboard.

This is one example of the increasingly popular after-market add-ons that motorists have to choose from today.

The problem is there is nothing — no legislation, education or awareness — preventing motorists from installing these systems on the dashboard of a truck or a car, in plain view of the motorist.

The motorist in the next lane could be paying more attention to the latest video release than to the road, and you.

Perhaps the greatest cause of vehicle crashes today — and road-related deaths — is a traffic safety issue about which most Canadians have heard little and know even less: distracted driving.

It comes in many shapes and forms. Some are considered socially acceptable behaviours, such as eating and drinking, checking a map, chatting with a passenger or disciplining children in the back seat. Some are less socially acceptable, such as talking on cell-phones. Some are truly bizarre, such as reading or making a salad in the front seat.

So how do we get road users to change their behaviours in favour of a safer driving environment?

We cannot legislate many behaviours any more than we can realistically afford to enforce that legislation. And legislation without enforcement is a paper tiger.

But we can educate people and make them more aware of the consequences of their actions.

Consider a similar situation that occurred in Canada more than 30 years ago: the "buckle-up for safety" campaign of the 1970s.

Before 1976, when seatbelt use became mandatory in cars, most vehicles were not equipped with this now standard safety feature. Seatbelts were first used in Canada in 1962 but were not included in the basic models of automobiles. Until 1970, motorists had to purchase aftermarket seatbelts and have them installed. Many of these seatbelts did not meet provincial safety standards. In the early 1970s, seatbelt installation became mandatory in all vehicles; in 1976, it also became mandatory for motorists and passengers to wear them while the vehicle was in motion.

For almost all drivers on the road today, it is only natural to buckle up.

The seatbelt program was largely successful because it relied on public education. Television commercials demonstrated how motorists and passengers without seatbelts are projected through the windshield on the impact of a crash.

This, and similar public messages, contributed to greater numbers of Canadians using seatbelts. Thirty years later, more than 90 per cent of Canadians buckle up when they get into a vehicle.

Today, research tells us that driver distraction is the cause of as many as eight out of 10 vehicle crashes.

It's obvious we need a similar message: We need to shake up motorists, passengers, employers and technology developers to help eliminate distractions and take driving seriously again.

Last week, the Canadian Automobile Association called for a restriction on the use of electronic devices by novice drivers.

This is not meant as a punishment for new motorists, as much as it is protecting them from some of the preventable distractions that exist, and helping to create a generation of drivers who understand the far-reaching implications of distractions.

Knowing what we know today about how seatbelts save lives and prevent injuries, why wouldn't we want to do all we can to reduce driver distractions?

David Flewelling is national president of the Canadian Automobile Association.



More Comment...
U.S. border security: Belt, suspenders or both? ask Joel Sokolsky and Philippe Lagassé
globeandmail.com



GLOBAL WARMING

Pay for it now, or pay for it later



Virtually every passing week the evidence grows concerning the serious dangers of manmade climate change. The Earth is warming, glaciers are melting, new pest infestations are multiplying, species are being threatened with extinction, and much more is to come. Politicians run from the problem, and brave souls who put forward serious policy options get lambasted. Yet with sound policies, the long-term costs of solutions are likely to be much lower than is currently believed.

The challenge is easy to state, if difficult to accomplish. We have a fossil-fuel-based world economy, built upon oil, gas and coal. Without plentiful and low-cost energy, the standard of living and future economic growth would plummet. Yet the same fossil fuels that undergird our economy are the source of carbon dioxide emissions when the fuels are burned, and rising concentrations of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere are the most important cause of manmade climate change.

The great complications of this issue come down to the following basic facts. First, fossil fuels remain cheaper than the alternatives. Given the plentiful reserves of tar sands, coal and other non-conventional fossil fuels, this is likely to remain true even if traditional oil and gas reserves reach a peak of production in the near future.

Second, fossil fuels are used everywhere in the world, so even if Canada or a selected group of countries slows its use of fossil fuels, others are likely to pick up the slack. Solutions require global cooperation.

And third, the lead time for decisively changing the energy infrastructure is measured in decades and generations, not years. Needed changes will include new technologies, not yet developed, as well as a shift among existing technologies.

Given these daunting obstacles, politicians have ducked the issue rather than go for real solutions

that will require foresight, long-term investments and lots of global negotiations. Yet homemade solutions will mean nothing unless they are part of international agreements, and agreements with teeth. The United States' absence from the Kyoto protocol, for example, is an act of extreme irresponsibility. Kyoto is imperfect, but it's a start. Canada and other signatories need to stick to international commitments while expanding and improving upon them by bringing India, China, the U.S. and others to the table.

Ironically, the costs of addressing climate change are likely to be much less than is widely feared, and vastly less than continued neglect.

Extremists who say that we need to abandon our way of life and cut our living standards sharply in order to preserve the environment are wrong and unhelpful. They paralyze real actions rather than promote them.

And they misunderstand our real choices.

The key is to make a transition in the coming decades to an energy system that no longer emits billions of tons of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. Part of the answer, clearly, will be improved efficiency in power generation and use. Hybrid vehicles and lighter materials in vehicles can substantially increase kilometres per litre. Cogeneration of electric power and heating can raise power-plant efficiency. Non-carbon energy sources — nuclear, wind, solar — will all play a significant role, albeit one with a gradual increase in their share of energy supply.

But another part of the answer is likely to be the capture and sequestration of carbon at fossil-fuel power plants. Technologies already exist to capture carbon dioxide from the exhaust gases of coal- and gas-fired plants, and then ship the carbon dioxide in pipelines to sites where it will be injected under the ground for geological sequestration. This technology is still un-



Putting a tax, or other price, on carbon emissions is the best way to save this planet, says **JEFFREY SACHS**

proved at any significant scale, but the costs of carbon capture and sequestration, when widely applied, could be as low as one to three cents per kilowatt hour.

In short, the growing evidence suggests that a comprehensive control program, entered into step by step by all countries over the coming decades, would cost less than 1 per cent of world income, and probably much less.

With the health of the world and its species in mortal peril, this would truly be the bargain of our era, a must-buy. Yet, how can we get there? The single most important step, by far, is to put a market price on carbon emissions. Companies that figure out how to produce energy without carbon emissions (for example, through successful capture and sequestration) should get a boost compared to the emitters. Households that economize on types of energy use that emit carbon should get a break compared with those who don't.

The market price can be a tax on carbon emissions or a subsidy for avoided emissions. Either way, the vast multitude of individual decisions that are taken around the world, on which fuels, automobiles, home energy systems, power plant designs or research agendas to adopt, will all be guided toward the right long-term solutions —

and without intrusive bureaucratic processes that are easy to corrupt and politicize.

A reasonable starting price for carbon emissions might be around \$20 per ton of carbon dioxide, which would translate roughly into about four cents a litre of gasoline, or roughly 1.5 cents per kilowatt hour.

To head off a long-term doubling of atmospheric carbon dioxide, the price of emissions would likely have to rise gradually to perhaps \$30 to \$50 per ton of carbon dioxide within a decade or two, depending on how new technologies develop. The European Union already has put on such a price on carbon through its "cap and trade" system of carbon-emission permits.

A tax on carbon emissions, as proposed last week by the province of Quebec and mused about by Michael Ignatieff, would be another effective approach.

A combination of methods is likely to prevail, one that includes carbon taxes, carbon emissions permits, and subsidies for non-carbon-emitting technologies, including subsidies for research and development in new technologies.

Supporters of putting a price on carbon often get attacked by populist politicians whose time horizon is the next election. Yet the sooner we put a price on carbon emissions, the sooner we will see that practical and large-scale technological solutions will jump to the fore, and at a cost much lower than widely feared. Today's business leaders who want to do the right thing — for example, to construct new power plants that capture and sequester carbon — are blocked by the lack of a bottom-line motivation that they can sell to their corporate boards and regulators.

It's time we provided them with the economic inducement; it's time we aligned market forces and global survival.

Jeffrey D. Sachs is director of the Earth Institute at Columbia University in New York.

Market meltdown: Look on the bright side



JIM STANFORD

It's been a rough ride for financial investors lately, as a turnaround in investor sentiment knocked trillions of dollars from the paper value of global stock markets. In Canada, the Toronto Stock Exchange lost almost 15 per cent of its value. About \$300-billion in shareholder value — half of Canada's national debt, or a quarter of our GDP — disappeared in a mere 39 trading days.

The Toronto market won back some of those losses late last week, as professional bottom-feeders pounced on leftovers abandoned by the panicked masses. But the dominant mentality in the market remains gloomy, and the market's "correction" — an innocuous euphemism that disguises the ugly panic driving the process — isn't finished yet.

Fear once again overwhelms greed in the ongoing battle of emotions that explains the markets' awesome bipolarity.

Indeed, for all their pseudo-rational talk of "technical analysis" and "picking winners," financial investors are really just a gigantic,

well-heeled flock of geese. One finds a lucrative-looking pond, and the whole lot rushes over to dig in. But when one goose spots something that might be dangerous and takes off, the whole flock panics and flies away. Even if the other geese don't see the danger, they follow the lead of the first goose — just in case that goose knows something the rest of them do not.

When geese come and go, they leave behind short grass and disgusting droppings. When financial investors come and go (with apparently equivalent foresight), they can wreak havoc on entire economies. So we should be rightly critical of the continuing mood swings of the investing set. Every boom-and-bust cycle should remind us that the markets do not deserve genuine economic credibility and power — any more than a petulant three-year-old deserves any real decision-making power within a household.

On the other hand, there is ample reason for rank-and-file Canadians to pretty much ignore all the fuss. This downturn won't make any visible difference to the real economy — the one that produces goods and services that are actually useful (as opposed to frenetically buying and selling pieces of paper).

In the first place, this correction won't be nearly as bad as the dot-com meltdown of 2000-02, when the Toronto market lost one-third of its value (much thanks to the col-

“ Heck, the downturn could even help Canada's auto industry. Just think: Bay Street traders won't get bonuses this year. So they can't afford their usual (imported) BMWs.

lapse of Nortel Networks).

This time around, the market did not inflate to such unreasonable heights. And the energy and commodity stocks that drove most of the recent action collectively account for a smaller share of the total market than Nortel alone did back in 2000.

Also, unlike dot-com operations that never earned a dollar in real profit (yet commanded market valuations measured in 10 figures or more), Canada's energy and mining giants have been pulling in serious money indeed (courtesy of anyone who's filled up their car with gas in the past year). Those profits remain strong, despite the storm clouds currently threatening commodities prices, and that will provide a reasonably strong floor to this correction.

The same factors undermining global commodity prices should also let some of the steam out of Canada's overinflated currency. That

alone could save thousands of jobs in manufacturing. It should also give our policy-makers cause to rethink their current infatuation with tar-sands plants and other resource megaprojects. What goes up must eventually come down — and this is as true of minerals as hot-air balloons. The current correction should remind us to re-examine how many eggs we are placing in the commodities basket.

The recent infatuation with income trusts will be another casualty of a good, bracing correction — and rightly so. Many investors believe (wrongly) that these assets are just as safe as bonds. A good downturn in the markets, and a corresponding shrinkage in commodity income flows, will knock the stuffing out of many trusts and bring the whole trust sector back to earth.

Heck, the downturn could even help Canada's auto industry. Just think: Bay Street traders won't get bonuses this year. So they can't afford their usual (imported) BMWs. Instead, they might think about a beautiful black Chrysler 300 or Chevrolet Impala — both made within spitting distance of Toronto's now-gloomy skyscrapers. That's poetic justice for the people in our society who actually produce for a living.

Jim Stanford is an economist with the Canadian Auto Workers union, and the author of Paper Boom.

Mr. Ignatieff is Canadian enough for me



LYSIANE GAGNON

Michael Ignatieff, the front-runner in the federal Liberal leadership race, is not without flaws. But one criticism raised against him is distinctly unfair: the fact that the largest part of his career was outside Canada would somehow disqualify him from vying for the top job in the land.

"Living through the crises and challenges of a place and dealing with people and prejudices of that place," writes Globe columnist Jeffrey Simpson, "teach an individual in ways that a more intellectual understanding cannot."

I beg to differ. One could become a good prime minister without having witnessed, day after day, the debilitating saga of the Meech Lake and Charlottetown constitutional accords. When the Canadian elites were engulfed in this boring crisis, Mr. Ignatieff was producing public affairs programs for the BBC. He was living and writing in London, an intellectually challenging metropolis and major international crossroads. Would he have gained more insight on politics and human beings if his life had revolved around Ottawa's Convention Centre, Parliament Hill and the bar of the Westin Hotel?

Mr. Ignatieff later moved on to Harvard. He missed Kim Campbell's ups and downs and the dirty squabbles between the Chrétien and the Martin clans. But whatever he did miss would have been greatly counterbalanced by the rich experiences he gained abroad.

Why the fuss? Mr. Ignatieff actually spent his formative years in Toronto, where his family has been rooted for two generations and where he received his undergraduate degree in history. It's more than Joe Volpe, another contender for the Liberal leadership, can say. Mr. Volpe was born in Italy; one could say that he missed out on crucial Canadian experiences since he has no childhood memories of Canada. And what about Ujjal Dosanjh, the Liberal MP and former B.C. premier who came to Canada at 21? If Canadian politicians were to be judged according to their degree of "Canadianness," first-generation immigrants would be automatically excluded.

In a country as diverse and vast as Canada, applying strict "Canadianness" criteria would disqualify those who are not acquainted with the Toronto-Ottawa axis that forms the hub of federal politics. Even Pierre Trudeau was seen as vaguely alien in Toronto's Liberal political and business circles. He didn't like baseball; he didn't laugh at the same jokes; he didn't have the same lifestyle.

Because they come from a distinct culture, French-speaking Quebecers miss a great deal of what, for an English-speaking Central Canadian, would be considered quintessentially Canadian. So would those who never lived outside British Columbia or Newfoundland, two provinces that are relatively remote from the Canadian mainstream. The cultural gap would be greater for aboriginals raised in the North.

If one adheres to a stereotyped view of what a political leader's previous experiences should be, then even age could be a problem. Parti Québécois Leader André Boisclair was born in 1966. He has no memory of the 1970 October crisis and he was only 14 when the 1980 referendum on sovereignty was held. Yet, it didn't occur to anyone that his lack of personal knowledge of the recent history of the sovereigntist movement would be a political handicap.

Much has been said about the fact that, in some of his speeches in the United States, Mr. Ignatieff indirectly referred to himself as an American, as if it were damning evidence that he had betrayed his Canadian soul. I would rather think that, when he was speaking about world affairs and terrorism, he identified with the Americans in the sense that he shared their fundamental values and the same worries about threats posed by radical Islam. Rhetorically speaking, isn't it easier to use "we" when one is calling for a specific attitude. The "you" may sound paternalistic.

In any case, if someone loves Canada enough to want to renounce the gratifying life of an intellectual for the hassles of political life, that is enough for me.

lgagnon@lapresse.ca