# Points of View

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The Chilliwack Progress

## We need to prepare for 2022

Thank goodness the summer from hell is winding down.

It's been too much for anyone to bear with wildfires, rising COVID-19 cases and drought, just for starters.

The wildfire situation this summer has been very distressing, with the combination of hot and dry weather and human complacency wreaking havoc in our forests.

We've been through this before, but there must be far better preparation next year, way before the summer when it's too late to make adjustments or changes on the fly. We dodged a couple of bullets the last two years after horrific wildfire seasons in 2017 and 2018, but we must assume the worst will continually happen more often than not going forward.

Right off the top, campfires must be banned across the province during July and August. People need to get used to it, we simply can't afford any more human-caused fires than we have already.

There also needs to be a massive shutdown of back country areas during the two primary summer months. If it's not humans sparking fires in remote areas, there's hikers and bikers and ATVers needing to be rescued from remote locations. It's just too dangerous for search and rescue teams to be doing any more than needed.

Let's face it, people are not very receptive to being told what they can and cannot do.

But the damages being done are far too extensive and that means the public has to face facts. You can't always do what you want when the potential to torch forests and the threat to human lives from some careless actions is so high.

We were lucky in the Fraser Valley. There were a couple of small fires nearby that fortunately did not spread to anywhere near the high degree as the Interior. Preparations in early 2022 will be paramount across the province. Locations that could lead to fuel for fire need to be identified and cleared ahead of time.

Weather obviously is a key factor of which we have no control, but these dry patterns also require the utmost in care to avoid more of the province being burned to a crisp.

*– Black Press Media*

### Community Camera

**Jeff Epp of Hope sent in this photo he took of a truck on Highway 1 passing a debris fire in Abbotsford on Sept. 1, 2021. If you've captured a photograph of people, places or events from around Chilliwack that you would like to share, email it to editor@theprogress.com, with "Community Camera" in the subject line.**

### Editor's Notebook

## On false balance and the death of expertise

A remarkable aspect of human development over the last few decades is that the more we know, well, the less we seem to know.

The internet often gets blamed for being a cesspool of misinformation. And maybe we shouldn't shoot the messenger. On the other hand, if, as Marshall McLuhan put it, the medium is the message, it's hard not to blame the internet for bringing so much confusion into our lives.

"These are dangerous times. Never have so many people had access to so much knowledge, and yet been so resistant to learning anything."

That quote is from Tom Nichols' 2017 book, *The Death of Expertise*.

I have not read Nichols' book. But recent loud voices questioning accepted health science have me pondering this notion, "What happened to a public reliance on experts?"

One year after the election to the White House of a reality show host who often decried facts and science, *The Death of Expertise* was published. Now, four years later, I think the situation might be getting worse.

**Paul HENDERSON**

Joe Rogan is a UFC colour commentator and comedian with a podcast. Why rely on him for information about COVID-19? I don't know. Ask the hundreds of thousands of people sharing his nonsense on social media.

A 2015 Pew Research Center poll of U.S. adults in 2015 found that 87 per cent of scientists agreed with the statement, "Climate change is mostly due to human activity," compared with only 50 per cent of U.S. adults.

How did we come to this? Nichols blames three main factors: higher education, Sturgeon's Law, and journalism.

On higher education, the commodification of school has led some institutions to handhold young people so completely and give them safe spaces where students are made to feel comfortable and free from criticism, that egos can become inflated.

"If I'm never told that what I say is wrong, maybe I'm never wrong?"

Then there is Sturgeon's Law, attributed to mid-20th century science fiction writer Theodore Sturgeon who was tired of being asked why he wrote science fiction when most of science fiction was bad.

"Ninety per cent of *everything* is crud," he replied.

Then there is journalism. The explosion of news sources is not a more-is-better scenario, as Stuart Vyse put it writing about the need for experts in an article in *Skeptical Inquirer*, an article where he referred to Nichols' book.

"Once again, Sturgeon's Law applies," Vyse writes. "In particular, the development of a huge market for news-as-entertainment has created a decades-long attack on established knowledge."

Think Fox News.

What underlies much of this, I think, is the Dunning-Kruger effect, which is a cognitive bias that states people with low cognitive ability tend to think they are smarter than they are.

The effect also states that people with high cognitive ability tend to downplay their expertise.

On the former, think of your friend on Facebook who failed high school biology but posts memes proudly espousing his criticism of pandemic public policy. And for the latter, think of doctors and health scientists who understand that COVID-19 is new, the science is changing, and all they can provide is the best available information day by day.

We've received some criticism from some readers via email, some phone calls, and some trolling on social media, that we are not providing the "other side" of the vaccination argument.

But this would be false balance, like asking a tobacco lobbyist to debate the causes of lung cancer with a doctor.

The nature of knowledge is that it is often nuanced, hard to explain fully, completely. Many experts who understand the limitation of knowledge thereby downplay their expertise, pointing to discoveries that shift our collective insights into certain phenomena.

Meanwhile, the chattering classes who already know everything, or decide their expert is Joe Rogan, have no time for nuance. No time for complications. No time for expertise.

With true knowledge comes humility. With ignorance comes arrogance.

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