

MLA DR. DAVID SWANN SAYS CLIMATE CHANGE IS A PUBLIC HEALTH ISSUE

“**W**hen we burn a thousand barrels of oil a second on the planet, that’s a stunning figure. How blind we are if we don’t think that will affect the thin covering of air we have on the earth. Our atmosphere covers our planet with the thickness of a coat of varnish on the surface of a basketball.” Calgary Mountain View MLA Dr. David Swann is dead certain that climate change is a vital public health issue.

He must be. Back in 2001 he took the question to the Alberta Society of Medical Officers. Dr. Swann was the Chief Medical Officer for the Palliser Health Region and President of the Alberta Society. His medical colleagues endorsed the Kyoto protocol. But when Swann said publicly in Medicine Hat that the Kyoto protocol was a public health priority, the government and the Health Region Board immediately fired him.



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“I took that as an invitation to make the connections between the environment, politics and health,” David Swann says. “Climate change has a number of connections for me, most obviously the emerging diseases resulting from more exotic diseases moving north like Nile virus.”

The indirect effects of climate change, disastrous weather, flooding, and drought also concern Swann. He says that the impacts on food production could be huge and we could face an era with massive numbers of environmental refugees and conflict even here in North America.

“We have tremendous options for energy and there is a tremendous moral imperative for us to look at making the

shift,” Swann says. “But in Alberta where as many as one in two jobs depend on the fossil fuel industry, it’s pretty hard to be objective,” he says.

“We in the health system are very conscious that by not preventing things we end up paying a lot more later. For example, spending a dollar up front on poor children saves seven dollars later.”

“If we do the right thing now we will be able to provide things like health services and education later. If we don’t we’ll be using all our resources on crisis management of the climate change impact.” 🍷