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# CHRIS TURNER

TAKES

## THE LEAP

{ALONG WITH}

OVER

## 70 WRITERS

IN THE  
CITY FOR

## WORDFEST

# TURNER TURNS IT UP

## LOCAL AUTHOR IS LOOKING FOR A LEAP OF FAITH IN ENERGY

KENZIE LOVE

**“Oh,** so Mother Nature needs a favour,” *The Simpsons’* Monty Burns once spat contemptuously. “Well, maybe she should have thought of that when she was besetting us with droughts and floods and poison monkeys. Nature started the fight for survival, and now she wants to quit because she’s losing. Well I say, hard cheese.”

Calgary author Chris Turner, whose debut book *Planet Simpson* detailed the show’s incisive take on issues including the environment, disagrees with this attitude, but his reasoning might surprise the Mr. Burns of the world. In his new book, *The Leap: How to Survive and Thrive in the Sustainable Economy*, Turner argues fundamental change, particularly switching to cleaner energy sources, is indeed necessary to avert environmental catastrophe. But enacting it, he believes, will not destroy the industrial economy but rather create a brighter future for both people and the planet — something many don’t yet appreciate.

“The conversation remains stuck in a frame where we’re talking about going without something,” he says. “And in essence we are, because we are talking about really needing to

greatly reduce our reliance on fossil fuels, very, very quickly if possible. But going without fossil fuels, unless you’re in the business of making fossil fuels, is not an inherent loss.”

In fact, he notes, it can actually be a gain. *The Leap* devotes considerable attention to Germany, where a dramatic increase in the use of renewable energy over the past decade has created 250,000 jobs. Although renewable energy is sometimes seen as unreliable, Turner believes Germany, where it provides almost 20 per cent of the electricity, offers evidence to the contrary. The country has reaped the benefits of investment in wind and solar power even though it’s not blessed with an abundance of wind or sun.

“The benefit has been proven,” Turner says. “Countries like Germany are proving, at a technical scale in renewable energy development, that there’s no limitation imposed by the intermittency factor.”

The future, in Turner’s opinion, will belong to whichever countries or companies are quickest to follow Germany’s leap onto a sustainable track. Alberta, however, has hesitated to make this change, and he fears that may prove costly.

“The thing I worry about, and I

think it can be a particular worry for Canadians and an even more profound worry for Albertans, is that a lot of places make this jump, and we sit there on the failing track in an engine running out of fuel and don’t get our act together to make the transition until we lack the resources to do it.”

But making the jump, Turner stresses, doesn’t require Alberta to immediately cease oil production. Indeed, he believes the province’s resource revenues can help fund projects such as a high-speed rail link between Calgary and Edmonton, which he says could move passengers almost as fast as air travel while leaving a much smaller carbon footprint.

“One of the things that I think Calgary can show is that there’s no reason for an oil and gas town to be afraid of this stuff. It’s not about one versus the other, it’s about using one as leverage to get to the other. Unfortunately, I don’t see that leader-




ship right now at a provincial level in Alberta, but we have some pretty good stuff happening at a municipal level.”

But the key to the leap, as the book makes clear, isn’t so much about new technology as it is about a new mindset. It requires viewing the threat posed by climate change as, in the words of Homer Simpson, a “cris-tunity.” The leap, Turner writes, will

lead “not just somewhere safer, but somewhere better.” And once people realize this, he believes, there will be no turning back.

“I think that the more people get a chance to see and touch and experience this kind of sustainable economy, the more they’re going to want it.”

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