

Truth telling through fire

Heather Anne Wakeling Lister - August 2026

have been giving a lot of thought lately about honesty after listening to Addy, an eight-year-old descendant of the Buxton settlement say that it's her wish that our future world be 'truthful.'

At eight, she's already alert to differences between what's presented as honest, and what's actually true being held secret within that which remains closed, kept silent.

World renowned astrophysicist, author and science educator Neil deGrasse Tyson was a guest on a podcast called Mayim Bialik's Breakdown. Citing his understanding of three truths: the Personal, Political and Empirical, for him, empirical being foremost, based on science, planetary, and universal laws.

Tyson explained how one's personal truth defines perspectives, albeit co-created within political truths, which in turn are formed in relationship with the geographical and cultural milieu of their birth. Upon maturity, most become dumbfounded when a crisis reveals the chasm between cherished personal and political truisms, as empirical truths expose inescapable consequences as the result of cause-and-effect actions.

So, here I am at 65. Increasingly irritated with those who share their spittle. Whether in front of a microphone at a community celebratory luncheon, or globally on-line, personal contempt, insolence and distrust for our world is repeated so often it's forming negative thought-prisons that absorb the absurd.

Yet, when these same personalities are invited to discuss their views and propose solutions that could help solve what they fear most, they snub their noses, preferring to wallow in unwavering personal beliefs, scapegoating authors, journalists, filmmakers and scientists as enemies against medical advances, recorded history, big politics and business.

Reporters are reviled for documenting an increasing discord between that which is personal and political. At a community level, examples of this are the dismissal of reported warnings of systemic issues relating to lack of affordable housing, rising addiction, and crime linked to the erosion of currency's value in purchasing goods and services.

Leading through to naysaying national coverage relaying threats made by the current American administration to absorb the Canadian border and destroy our democratic sovereignty.

Meanwhile, international warfare is increasingly efficient in upping the kill count, as if bombing Dresden, Japan and Vietnam were not enough to warn us of the environmental damage being done.

The past five years have seen Ukraine, Gaza, Iran and other Middle Eastern countries blown to pieces. Add in the mining of international waterways, the bombing of suspected drug trafficking ships, releasing fentanyl, or whatever toxic drug cargo they were purportedly carrying into the water.

Now we have the retaliatory drone attacks on Russian oil fields and infrastructure sending additional fumes laden with chemicals into the stratosphere.

By ignoring the cause and effect while deliberately polluting our oceans, fresh water, and farmable land, politics has allowed a continual attack at the very core of humanities' imperfect objective to create within an ever-complicated world, access to balanced opportunity, on a life sustaining planet.

And it's getting harder to determine the difference.

Using the fire crisis as an example, I'll try.

Personal truth: Thousands have, and are, losing their homes, livestock, their way to earning a living. Despite those who discredit global warming, across the continent people are choking on smoke from burning boreal forests. And, as I'm writing this, our home's windows are closed because I can't risk further damage to my lungs and troubled heart by breathing wildfire smoke from Northern Ontario.

Political truisms: America is weaponizing the wildfire crisis against Canadian sovereignty. Political rhetoric ignoring that within their own border, stats report that in 2026, 40,989 wildfires with 3.9 million acres have been burnt. Out of 27 current fires, six remain uncontained.

Doug Ford's government cut \$42 million from the Ministry of Natural Resources last year, begging the question, where are the water bombers that apparently were ordered, but never budgeted for?

Additionally, fire fighting is a provincial responsibility. Constitutional division of power and access to money, means that Doug Ford now has to ask Prime Minister Carney for financial assistance as Ontario is faced unprepared, in a post-crisis position.

The American administration has dismissed Canada as an ally in support of universal humanity. Ignoring how Canada has always been ready to help in a crisis. During 9/11, and Gander's hosting stranded airline passengers, or how Canada recently sent military pilots to help rescue teenagers trapped at a Minnesota YMCA camp. Nor has there been mention to honour Canadian helicopter pilot Nicholas Dale, who died on July 12, when his K-MAX aircraft crashed into the Silver Jack Reservoir while battling the out-of-control Gold Mountain Fire in southwestern Colorado.

Dismissing our Canadian Air Force rescue of Los Angeles, and other areas within California from total erasure by American wildfire, incoherent rhetoric from Michigan State Senator Aric Nesbit warns Canada that if we can't

‘handle’ the fire problem they will. Going as far as Senator Bernie Moreno introducing legislation that focuses on Canadian leaders with threats to cancel their visas and seize their assets.

Compare with empiric truisms: Fire, air and water are not defined by country borders, therefore fire is not limited to Canada alone. Forest fires at this magnitude are related to climate change. And land itself is not forever solid due to fracking on fault lines.

Canada’s own fire season was partially fueled by a fire jump from Minnesota. Canadian crews are engaged in fighting fire in the American northwest, not to mention our own fires engulfing our north. The Canadian total is between 3,895 to 3,915, with 3 million hectares or about 7.4 million acres of land burnt. At time of writing 180 are active, 136 in Ontario’s northwest region with 63 of these classified as out of control. Of the 44 in the northeast region, nine are classified out of control. Eight new fires were reported on July 22.

Fire fed on communities including Armstrong, Lac La Croix First Nation, Whitesand First Nation, Gull Bay First Nation and Lac des Mille Lacs First Nation. Thousands have evacuated, and in Collins, people without assistance, narrowly escaped by boat.

Now, I ask you: When was the last time a Canadian Prime Minister received a letter from Michigan politicians requesting that Canada stop the smoke? Or a threat from the American president to tariff Canada over the smoke from the climate fires?

And did I really expect the current White House administration to share how best we can continue to work together and confront these fires? My personal, political and empiric answer: No.

Despite those who continue to claim climate change as fake news, the truth has been written in empirical headlines that were not written by ‘lying’ journalists. Fire, long past useful as a plot within a spooky fireside story, is now a real-time horror show.

For everyone putting their lives in harms way, trying to starve fire behind burn lines, whether American, Canadian or international, I thank you. Empirically. Absolutely.