

Building the People's Climate Plan

by Robin Tress

The federal government has been holding Climate Change Town Halls across the country to inform their National Climate Strategy, which will be released by December. The Council of Canadians has responded through an initiative called the People's Climate Plan. This initiative was put together by a coalition of groups working to make climate action work for us – the people. We are coming together to demand a national plan that focuses on what we really need: effective climate action that attacks the root of the climate crisis.

The People's Climate Plan has three main requirements. In order to be effective and worthwhile, Canada's climate plan must align with the best available climate science, move us rapidly towards a 100 per cent renewable economy, and be justice-based.

Based in science

Science helps us perpetually refine our understanding of the world. Science tells me that since I was born in 1990, the global temperature every month of my life has been hotter than the average month in the last century. Earlier in my life, scientists largely agreed that if we could limit global warming below 2 degrees Celsius there would be a good chance that climate change would not spin beyond out of control.[As our understanding of climate change has evolved, scientists have determined that a 1.5 degree limit on warming is more compatible with a livable future, and in order to reach that limit, more than 80 per cent of remaining fossil fuel reserves must remain unburned.

So when we say that our climate plan must be aligned with science, we mean that the government's plan can't ignore the uncomfortable truth that the tar sands must stay unburned if we expect to have a livable future. Since we can't keep extracting bitumen, there is no need for new pipelines like Energy East or the Trans Mountain pipeline.

Council of Canadians' chapters work in communities across Canada for climate justice. Many chapters participated in the "100 per cent possible" rallies last fall to push for government action on climate change.

Rejecting these monstrous pieces of infrastructure is central to the People's Climate Plan and must be at the heart of Trudeau's climate plan too.

Not only does the People's Climate Plan call for no more pipelines to be built, it also calls for no new fossil fuel infrastructure. New LNG plants, tanker terminals, natural gas storage facilities, offshore oil rigs – under a science-based climate plan, these are all non-starters.

100% renewable economy

Since we need to aggressively ramp down global fossil fuel production, we need a different way to power our cities and homes. A 100% renewable economy is possible, achievable, and mandatory if we intend to avoid the worst effects of climate change. Better yet, the Council of Canadians believes we can – and must – have this renewable economy by the year 2050.

There are all kinds of ways to get our economy off fossil fuels. "Delivering Community Power" is one example of an opportunity to position Canada Post as the centrepiece of our new renewable economy. By running our mail fleet on renewable-powered vehicles, introducing postal banking and other services to communities across the country, and doing it all through one of Canada's strongest and most influential unionized workplaces, Canada Post could be a hub of the green transition.

Justice-based transition

Not only do fossil fuels harm our climate, but the extraction of fossil fuels and natural resources almost invariably involves steamrolling over a community



impacted by that extraction. In Canada, these communities tend to be poor, racialized or Indigenous communities, rural, and otherwise excluded from environmental decision-making processes. Furthermore, the impacts of climate change often hit these already marginalized communities the hardest.

While we build our renewable transition, it's critical to ensure that Indigenous communities are part of the discussion, and have given their free, prior and informed consent to new projects and programs. In line with this, the People's Climate Plan calls for the adoption of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

In the discussion about building a just transition we can't forget about the people who actually do the building. There are a huge number of skilled workers currently employed in unsustainable sectors who could be retrained so they could be employed in the new economy. This retraining will take investment from government and post-secondary educational institutions. Iron and Earth (ironandearth.org) is one organization working hard to shift workers from the fossil fuel industry to sustainable employment.

Many of the Council's chapters and supporters have already participated in local climate hearings and have shared information about this three-pronged people's plan. You can chip in too by attending an upcoming hearing in your area, or by submitting your ideas to the federal government's climate portal online.

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