



Five Actions for a National Climate Plan



by Andrea Harden-Donahue

Provincial ministers met with Prime Minister Trudeau in Vancouver in March to launch climate talks that will lay the groundwork for Canada to meet its obligations under the global Paris climate agreement.

This meeting was the first step to identifying tough choices that need to be made to ensure we are on a path towards addressing the growing climate change crisis. Right now we are far off course, with emissions set to rise above the weak climate targets set by the Harper government. Without additional action, fossil fuel emissions will continue to grow and the tar sands will lead the way.

Here are five things we can do for an effective national climate plan:

1. Freeze fossil fuel expansion

It is abundantly clear that more production, particularly of extreme forms of energy (extreme in their impacts on land, water, climate and communities)

like the tar sands, fracking and offshore drilling, must end. We must say no to projects like the Kinder Morgan and Energy East pipelines. Approving the Energy East pipeline could spur an increase of up to 40 per cent in tar sands production and generate more than 30 million tonnes of carbon pollution. Combined with Kinder Morgan's Trans Mountain expansion, this could unleash 45.4 million tonnes of carbon pollution annually. This is more than the annual climate pollution of eight provinces and territories.

We must ensure energy projects include consideration of their upstream and downstream climate impacts in light of Canada's pledged support to limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius. While the Trudeau government has promised to include a climate test for pipelines, it also continues to assert that oil needs to get to tidewater where it can be exported to other markets. We need to hold our government to

account for an effective and fair climate test and pipeline reviews.

2. A 100% clean energy economy by 2050

Not only is it entirely possible to have a 100% clean (or green) economy by 2050, it is necessary. This means more renewable energy from solar and wind, wave, geothermal and tidal power. This expansion would be best under public and community (or collective) ownership, ensuring that public benefits are maximized and community input is respected. It means dramatically improving efforts to conserve energy and a universal and accessible program for new energy-efficient buildings and retrofitting homes. We need more affordable and effective public transit that includes high speed rail, better energy and electricity sharing across borders, and an improved electricity grid.

Any federal infrastructure spending must be used for these opportunities, and not



Twenty-four Council of Canadians chapters across Canada took part in the “100% Possible” global climate march last November.

to further entrench our fossil fuel economy. In other words, we need money for renewable energy, public transit and retrofits, not more pipelines and highways.

How can all this be financed? Making good on Canada’s promise to eliminate subsidies to fossil fuel industries (which averaged \$2.9 billion over 2013 and 2014) would be a good start. The Leap Manifesto, a visioning document for Canada, calls for a progressive carbon tax. There is also military spending that could be redirected. We could increase corporate taxes, establish fines through effective corporate regulation, require higher royalty rates, or create a global financial transaction tax (also known as a Robin Hood tax).

3. Respecting Indigenous communities

Fully implementing the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) would go a long way towards mending the very broken relationship in this country between settlers and Indigenous communities. While the Trudeau government has recognized the need for improved relationships, questions remain as to whether free, prior and informed consent, as enshrined in UNDRIP, will be respected. First Nation communities are often most impacted by extreme energy projects and are also more likely to suffer from climate change impacts.

4. A just transition and equity measures

Critical to this plan will be the need to support workers and communities affected by the transition from fossil fuels to a clean economy by 2050. Measures like job training and other resources for workers in the coal industry (a sector that should be fully phased out by 2030) are needed to help transition workers into the clean energy economy.

Indigenous and low-income communities should be at the front of the line for building retrofits, which will help lower energy costs. As the Leap Manifesto highlights, “Indigenous peoples should be first to receive public support for their own clean energy projects. So should communities currently dealing with heavy health impacts of polluting industrial activity.”

5. Climate adaptation in the Global South

The countries that have historically contributed the most to climate change must take responsibility for paying for the adaptation (transitioning off of fossil fuel reliance) and mitigation (dealing with unavoidable climate impacts) costs of the Global South, the areas being hit hardest by the ravages of climate change. As was highlighted in a joint open letter endorsed by 55 Canadian organizations, including the

Council of Canadians, Canada’s fair share of the \$100 billion USD promised in the Paris climate agreement would require Canada to contribute \$4 billion a year until 2020. This figure is based on past precedents where Canada has contributed three to four per cent of multilateral funds.

All of these changes must be protected from investor-state dispute settlement (ISDS) provisions in trade deals that allow foreign corporations to sue governments for financial compensation if governments introduce new laws or practices – be they environmental, health or human rights – that negatively affect corporations’ bottom lines. The Council of Canadians is sharing a new report written by Osgoode Hall Law Professor Gus Van Harten – with a foreword by Maude Barlow – that includes proposed language for an ISDS carve-out that would protect a climate change agreement from the threat of corporate lawsuits.

Time is running out for the change that is needed. Climate scientists say this is the decade when major changes are needed if we are going to save the future of our planet. It is time to leap to a better future for all of us.

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