

Climate Action

The Issue of Our Time

The single biggest issue of our time, and maybe of all time, is how to address and respond to climate change. We need Climate Action and we need it now.

This month all across the planet, including here in Vancouver, youth, inspired by Sweden's Greta Thunberg and other young leaders like Canada's 'water warrior' Autumn Peltier, are striking in order to draw attention to the climate emergency we are facing. Politicians of all stripes in all countries are being accused of failing young people and the youth are starting to understand our betrayal. For our collective lack of action we are being told, "How dare you". None of us are immune to this criticism.

In previous posts I have spoken about the need for legal and policy changes as part of Climate Action in Canada. This includes the need for greater recognition of Indigenous jurisdiction over land and resource stewardship and addressing the environment as a head of jurisdiction with protections in our Constitution – where we give legal standing to the elements of the environment. Personally, I support the [Blue Dot movement](#) and encourage everyone to join it.

In this post I set out some of my evolving thoughts on developing a more robust and bold national Climate Action Plan. A Plan that should be non-partisan and that will and must survive the life of one government. I consider where we are and what we need to do in order to develop our Plan. I am not a climate expert and this post does not have all the answers. However, I am certain that no one political party has all the solutions and that we all have to work together. Please let me know what you think and share with others if so inclined.

Platforms are Not Enough

Each of the main political parties has released all, or part, of their 2019 platform on Climate Action:

- [Green Party Platform - Mission: Possible](#)

- [NDP Platform - Power to Change](#)
- Liberal Party Platform - Choose Forward
- [Conservative Platform - A “Real” Plan](#)

Partisan approaches to climate will not be enough to address this crisis. While each of the platforms contains good ideas, we need to work across party lines – recognizing that a level of consensus and a diversity of voices is necessary to address such a major issue. We also have to recognize that time is running out. We literally might be electing the last Parliament that will be able to take any meaningful Climate Action before it is too late.

Our bold national Climate Action Plan should be supported by specific legislation with clear emission targets and objectives, with regular updates to Parliament and to all Canadians. In developing the Plan we should work cooperatively with the Provinces and Indigenous governments. However, if we cannot get consensus, then Parliament will need to step up and use its powers to act in the interests of all Canadians. The stakes are too high for regionalism and self-interest.

The History, the Science and the Targets

What is so astonishing about the climate crisis is that we have known about it for decades but have not taken it seriously until now.

As David Suzuki and others experts often remind us, as early as the 1960s the fossil fuel industry knew about climate change. Many others knew as well. They knew that burning fossil fuels was contributing to the build up of greenhouse gases and had the potential to create an uncontrollable state of warming. The choice of the fossil fuel industry was to follow the tobacco industry’s lead – to deny the threat and question the science.

Fast-forward to 1988 when we saw the United Nations established the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and in 1989 when climatologists first declared global warming was a threat to human survival and declared it “second only to nuclear war”. The IPCC is now one of the most authoritative, if not the most authoritative, bodies on climate change, reporting regularly on the state of climate science, and its impact on humanity. Since then world leaders have been meeting annually through the UN to [discuss the climate crisis](#).

In 2015, in Paris, when world leaders met, there was agreement on a target to reduce green house gas emissions to attempt to restrict the rise in global temperature to 1.5°C to 2.0°C above pre-industrial levels by 2100. Canada signed onto the [Paris Agreement](#), and the Prime Minister stated that Canada aimed to limit the temperature rise as close to 1.5°C as possible.

The latest reality check from the IPCC is that we need new targets to get us to 1.5°C, and we only have eleven years to do so. In October of 2018, the IPCC issued a [Special Report](#) declaring global temperature is already more than 1°C higher than pre-industrial times. We know that a rise beyond 1.5°C this century will have catastrophic ecological, economic and social consequences which could threaten the very foundations of civilization. To meet the 1.5°C ceiling, the report called for reductions in fossil fuel use by 45% by 2030 and 100% by 2050. These must now be our minimum targets.

No question, these are incredibly challenging targets – in large part because politicians have lacked the vision or the will to implement the changes that were called for back in the 1990s and early 2000s. Those of us with the responsibility of elected office today cannot repeat the mistakes of our predecessors. Targets cannot simply be 'aspirational' or just the subject of political dialogue and debate. We need real commitments. The harsh truth is that we are still on a path to global temperatures in the range of 4.0 to 5.0°C this century.

To some, I know, all this may sound alarmist. But is it not obvious as we watch our glaciers melt, our forests burn, as there are increased and regularly occurring floods, more droughts, more powerful storms, and as the sea level is visibly rising? Canada, as a northern nation, is, warming at twice the global average and three times the rate in the Arctic. At the same time our emissions per capita are four times the global average. This is not because we are a northern country – Sweden, Norway and Denmark all use less per capita than we do, which puts the lie to Canada's claim about our so-called "northernness".

Meeting our Targets

During the last session of Parliament the House of Commons declared a "[national climate emergency](#)". This will be mostly symbolic unless we take action and have an actual plan we can all get behind. There are a lot of ideas

in Party platforms. We need to look at them all. However, emission reduction is the only true measure of action and progress on climate that we have, and we still have not seriously attempted it in Canada. The IPCC targets will only be achieved if reducing fossil fuel use is the goal for all political parties. We need to get to the required level of GHG emissions by 2030 and zero by 2050. This month, Canada has committed, along with 65 other countries, to meet the zero target by 2050. We have to find more ways to do this as right now we do not have a plan that will allow us to meet this commitment.

There is good news. Canada is increasingly relying less on fossil fuels to drive our economy – either to power our industry and our homes or to export for income – and there are more changes afoot as we wean ourselves off of our appetite for oil and gas. However, the big questions are how long will it take and will it be enough? Will it be soon enough? Accordingly we need to keep our own science current and our national bold Climate Action Plan must be flexible and timely.

The most efficient way to change behaviours and reduce emissions to meet the IPCC targets is by having a price on carbon. Carbon pricing is almost universally seen by experts as the simplest and most effective market-based approach to reducing GHGs. Putting a price on Carbon has been advocated by right wing think tanks for decades. In fact, Conservatives have advanced some of the most important initiatives in environmental stewardship. As an example, Brian Mulroney and his government made significant advances to address acid rain. We also know that here in BC the provincial carbon tax brought in by the centre right BC Liberals is working and endorsed by the current NDP government. The big question is how high the carbon price should, or could go? I am not going to speculate here, but suffice it to say that all plans that include a price will see it rise. In our national Climate Action Plan we need to settle on what rate and over what time frame we get there. It is important that we are clear on our price for carbon so the market can factor it in to their emissions-reducing investments. Long-term and costly investments are needed and if we expect individuals and companies to make these investments they need to know what the future value of those investments will be.

While carbon pricing is a key to reduce emissions, no single idea will work on its own. In addition to carbon pricing there are others ways to reduce

emissions, including regulation of technology and energy. Some of the ideas will require new policy or changes to laws. In some cases, these will require significant federal investment. In other cases, different orders of government have a significant role to play. Some of these opportunities include:

- an end to all fossil fuel subsidies;
- increased regulation of emissions and higher standards;
- expanding incentives for all new vehicles to be electric or zero emission within an agreed to period;
- strengthening of building codes and building rules where, over time, all new construction is to be energy neutral – there is a need to give the market sufficient lead time and incentives to achieve;
- market incentives for companies that produce zero emissions, including tax credits or lower tax rates;
- expanded use of market incentives for companies investing in green technology;
- retrofit all federal buildings within a timeframe to be agreed upon
- support for home owners and businesses to retrofit buildings using tax and other incentives;
- increase investments in green public infrastructure;
- ban all single use plastics;
- increase tree planting and supporting the greening of cities; and
- food sustainability and incentive to reduce food waste.

This list is, of course, is not comprehensive and we need to hear other ideas and be open to them. Not just make promises but to actually work cooperatively and look at all the ideas and solutions. Which have the most impact for the investments with public money? Which will be the quickest and easiest to implement?

In addition to these actions we need to help prepare those affected most by the transition, including assistance to those whose livelihood is directly or indirectly tied to the oil and gas sector.

The Just Transition

This is a transition. To a “green economy” and a new world adjusting to climate change. As a society we need to plan for this transition. Our national

Climate Action Plan is going to have to address this transition in a more meaningful way than it currently does.

Business needs time to adjust. People need time to adjust. Just not too much time. This is where the politics becomes very real as it affects people's livelihood. Either the new jobs already being created by the green economy, or those ultimately lost in the oil and gas sector during the transition. While many new jobs are already being created more will be needed and those that will lose their jobs need a real alternative.

We also need to prepare for the inevitable. Even if we meet our targets the planet will never be the same. Increased migrations will require our refugee policies to consider climate displacement. Low lying lands will be flooded and the more extreme weather events will continue. There will be more forest fires. We need to ensure we have adequate forecasting and emergency response plans with ever increasing coordination between jurisdictions. New investments will be required to adjust.

While we all need time to adjust – and in particular industry – the transition is occurring faster than some may expect or want. We know there will ultimately be sacrifices that need to be made by all of us. Please do not let anyone tell you anything different. As a society we must find the balance and make the transition work within the time we have.

Our International Role

While we have a relatively small population in Canada, we are significant geographically given our landmass, seas, and our natural resources. Our forests are a part of the planet's lungs and our waters are one of the primary sources of natural freshwater and this will increasingly become the case. As a country we have to continue to punch above our weight. We must not understate our importance internationally. The north, as it opens up, even within accepted temperature increases, will need good governance as other countries challenge our sovereignty. And we will have to step up.

We need to use our influence to encourage other countries to do their part and hold them to account. This is perhaps our biggest challenge. Canada cannot do this alone. If other countries put a realistic price on carbon, phased out coal-fired electricity, and had clean fuel standards and subsidies for

electric vehicles we would be in a far better place globally. At the same time, for the developing world, we must also be mindful of our climate debt. Industrialized nations with historical responsibility need to do more.

One way to influence behaviour is through trade agreements that reflect and respect our domestic approaches to Climate Action. Trade agreements in the future should more fundamentally address climate change.

We must also continue to learn from what other advanced jurisdictions governing the climate fight are doing to reduce emissions. For example, California, where they are close to ensuring all new construction is zero net energy. There are many lessons to be learned and the governments of the world need to share wise practices. Nation states are watching each other.

On October 21st we will, in fact, be sending an important message to the world. If progressive MPs are not elected it will no doubt be viewed as another defeat globally for taking real Climate Action. Our election will have implications beyond our borders.

Indigenous Peoples & Environmental Stewardship

Finally, on the question of good governance and learning from one another, there is an increasing role to be played by Indigenous peoples in environmental stewardship – both domestically and internationally. While the climate crisis disproportionately affects poor countries, it also disproportionately affects Indigenous peoples. The fires this summer in the Amazon have brought world attention to the plight of Indigenous peoples and their role in protecting the world's environmental heritage.

Arguably, the peoples most impacted by climate change, whether in the Amazon or in the Arctic, are Indigenous peoples. People that live off the land and rely on it are among the best stewards of that land. You do not destroy that which sustains you. This is reflected in Indigenous legal orders, which are designed to ensure conservation of the resources of the natural world.

We are beginning to realize this in Canada – increasingly the powers of Indigenous self-governments over the environment are being recognized and implemented. However, we need to accelerate this process so that Indigenous governments can take their rightful place within our evolving

system of multilevel governance and cooperative federalism in Canada. We see this in the Lower Mainland already. We will all benefit.

Our Future Depends on Cooperation

The impact of climate change is already with us and it affects all aspects of public policy. Be it the economy, health, agriculture, forestry, fisheries, water issues, immigration and migration, social justice, Indigenous people, or other issues, we are all affected.

So for all those who will be in Parliament this fall, Climate Action must be our top agenda item. If I am re-elected I will aggressively advocate for an all-party climate caucus and a working group, and if we can, a cross party committee of Cabinet. This Climate Cabinet would be unprecedented, something more akin to a war-time effort. We are, in fact, in a climate war. As my friend Elizabeth May and others have said, we need to have a wartime mentality to address climate change. I will support and help in whatever way I can to see a legislated mandate for this non-partisan work and a bold national Climate Action Plan. Where our targets are set out in law with a plan to meet them and report our progress with openness and transparency informed by the latest climate science. This must be a multi-generational strategy.

Climate Action will cost money and we all have a role to play. [Recent surveys have shown that while we, as Canadians, want to do something about climate change we are less keen to pay for it.](#) The truth is we are all going to have to pay – either now, or if not now and not us, then the generations to come and where the price being paid is not money.

So this is a pivotal election. Our city, our country, and our planet face a fundamental challenge. A challenge unlike any other we have faced. A challenge that involves all of us. It is connected to everything – our economy, our way of life, what we eat, what we breath, where we live. It is the very fabric of who we are, and if we do not rise to the challenge it will effect all that we are – forever. When a challenge is connected to everything and everyone, what do we need to do to address it? The answer is simple — we have to work together, even though the solutions are difficult. In order to do our duty by future generations, it requires all of us to 'colour outside of the party lines'. History will judge us accordingly.