We have to legislate an end to carbon pollution and make a concrete plan to get there. We’ve got 30 years to completely transform the global economy. Let’s get started. This task is the biggest project humanity has ever undertaken. It requires collective action on a scale which can seem impossible in our current political context.

Failure is not an option here. Either we intentionally transform the global economy or climate change will do it for us with a vengeance. Thankfully, the world has the knowledge, technology and resources. All that’s missing is political will.

We need leaders who have the courage to take on the powerful corporate interests who profit from pollution. At the same time, we must tackle the inequalities which amplify the effects of climate change.

Pollution profiteers will push back — and we can’t be afraid to challenge them. Canada needs strong regulations with a plan to end carbon pollution by 2050. Read on for a slate of measures we can take over the next three decades to get there.

**CHANGE THE ECONOMY, NOT THE CLIMATE**

What does “zero carbon economy” actually mean? And what does it really look like? What is life like in a world where we’ve stopped pumping pollution into the atmosphere and are now working to reverse climate change? And how do we get there?

These questions define our times, yet nobody has all the answers. For too long, the response has been “pretty much the same, except with solar panels and electric cars and everything is more expensive.” That is hardly a vision for the future that can inspire change on the scale required to combat the global climate crisis.

This is a problem. In order to tackle global warming, we need to tackle all the ways humans are putting carbon dioxide in the atmosphere at an excessive rate — from burning coal, oil and gas to destroying original forests to raising cattle by the billions.

In the Paris Agreement of 2015, all the world’s nations gathered at the 21st United Nations Climate Conference and agreed to decarbonize the global economy by the last half of this century. Scientists tell us we need to actually stop carbon pollution by 2050.

Urgent social transformation is needed for humanity to limit global warming to its agreed-upon safe limit of 1.5 degrees celsius. Even at this limit, we will continue to experience worsening storms and droughts. Thousands of species and habitats will disappear. But it may prevent entire countries and ecosystems from being wiped off the face of the Earth.

Immediate, radical cuts to carbon pollution are our only option to get on course. Tinkering at the edges of polluting industries with carbon pricing and “clean” fossil fuels — as Canada is currently doing — will not be enough.

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IT’S NOT JUST THE WEATHER

Six months after Hurricane Maria’s devastating blow to Puerto Rico, the island is still a disaster zone. Hundreds of thousands are still without power and clean water. Fuelled by global warming, Hurricane Maria struck Puerto Rico with 225 km/h winds, two to three metres of storm surge and 51 to 64 centimetres of rain in some places. It was the strongest hurricane ever to hit the island.

More than 200,000 people fled in the immediate aftermath of the storm. Officials predict another 600,000 could leave for the mainland U.S. in the next five years — nearly a fifth of the island’s population.

Maria also landed in a perfect storm of inequality, imperialism and austerity. The U.S. colony was already in bankruptcy with more than $70 billion in debt.

In Alberta, much of Premier Rachel Notley’s carbon tax goes straight to tar sands companies in the form of direct subsidies per barrel of oil produced. Ontario and Quebec’s cap-and-trade system gives free carbon credits to certain big polluters, while others must pay to cut emissions.

As practices like slash burning in the forest industry and methane leaks from fracking are exempt, the effective, it needs to actually decarbonize the economy. That means an end to business models deliberately and unnecessarily shields the biggest polluters under the guise of preserving their competitiveness.

Photo: The Aerial photo of the Alberta tar sands

CARBON POLLUTION BY SECTOR IN CANADA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oil and Gas</td>
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<tr>
<td>Waste and Others</td>
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<td>8%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Heavy Industry</td>
<td>10%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Photo: Oil sands

Photo: Fracking plant burns sour gas

Photo: Oil and Gas

CARBON PRICING COMES WITH A CATCH

Canada’s current climate policy is centred around a price on carbon — federally mandated at $10 per tonne of pollution and set to rise to $50 in 2022.

Here’s the problem: for a well-designed carbon price to meet our targets it needs to rise to at least $200 by 2030. If Canada wants to use this strategy to decarbonize our economy fully, it would need to be far more aggressive.

At that point, carbon pricing may make life unaffordable for folks with no other options — often in rural and northern communities — so revenues must be used to soften the impact. In practice, however, this money most often ends up paying off big polluters.

In Alberta, much of Premier Rachel Notley’s carbon tax goes straight to tar sands companies in the form of direct subsidies per barrel of oil produced. Ontario and Quebec’s cap-and-trade system gives free carbon credits to certain big polluters, while others must pay to cut emissions.

British Columbia’s carbon tax mostly went to lowering corporate taxes, even as practices like slash burning in the forest industry and methane leaks from fracking are exempt.

These carbon pricing options are so full of holes because no government wants to take on dirty industries. Climate policy in Canada often deliberately and unnecessarily shields the biggest polluters under the guise of preserving their competitiveness.

Photo: Fracking plant burns sour gas

FLURO-WHAT?

Certain chemicals used in the manufacture of electronics, air conditioners and even tennis balls are tens of thousands of times worse for the climate than carbon dioxide. Banning the use or release of sulfur hexafluoride, perfluorocarbons and hydrofluorocarbons is a simple way to make a big dent in global warming.

Photo: Hurricane Maria, Puerto Rico (AP)
PUT THE TRANSIT IN TRANSITION

Carbon pollution from cars, trucks and planes is the second biggest cause of climate change in Canada. Changing the way we move people and goods around the country is critical to tackling the crisis. Thankfully, the solutions are ready to take over.

First of all, what’s needed is a massive expansion of local and regional public transit. While the federal government has invested $25 billion in transit over the next decade, that only scratches the surface of what’s needed. A budget ten times that would kick-off the transition needed to move to a zero carbon transportation system. This transit expansion must go hand-in-hand with the establishment of “complete communities” — communities where the majority of residents can live, work and play all within walking distance or a quick ride from a transit hub.

Of course, transit isn’t possible for every situation. Trucks are often used for work. In rural and northern communities, buses aren’t always practical. Electric vehicles are already storming in to fill in the gaps. But they need more than tax incentives.

Countries like Norway, France, England, even China and India are looking at banning the sale of vehicles run on fossil fuels. Canada should follow suit. If we’re serious about decarbonization, and we should be, we need to send a message to manufacturers and consumers alike that adding more polluting cars to the road will not be tolerated.

Transport trucks, ferries, planes and trains are already running on electric power in all corners of the world. But for the massive and rapid increase in transit use required, we need to legislate the switch as soon as it’s possible. It’s time for our governments to take charge and mandate an end to carbon-fuelled transportation.

POWER PAST DIRTY ENERGY

Canada has the easiest transition in its electricity sector. We can and should reach 100 per cent renewable power. It’s an entirely practical and viable goal, and we’re already on our way. Renewable energy already supplies 66 per cent of our nation’s electricity and coal power plants are on their way out.

But we won’t make it unless we set that intention and develop a plan to get there. The problem is coal plants are being swapped out for another climate change culprit — natural gas. Like buying a lifetime supply of light cigarettes, it might cut carbon in the short-term but makes it even harder to kick our fossil fuel habit. All new power must come from renewables.

Beyond electricity, people use fossil fuels in their homes for gas stoves and boilers. The good news is, there’s another source of gas which happens to save the climate in the process. Currently, almost seven per cent of the nation’s emissions come from waste. Almost all the food and yard scraps being tossed into landfills break down into methane — a highly potent greenhouse gas that’s 86 times as powerful as carbon dioxide over 20 years.

It’s also the exact same gas that restaurants use to give mushrooms the perfect sauté. We can easily retrieve it from landfills, compost sites and even sewage treatment plants to feed it into existing gas lines. British Columbia and Ontario already have programs for this renewable gas.

Canada needs to step in and mandate that all natural gas in the country must be derived from organic waste materials.

BUILDING THE FUTURE

In Canada, homes, offices, shops and warehouses make up the third biggest source of greenhouse gas emissions. Our day-to-day environments usually require heating and cooling, not to mention the cement and steel that go into building them.

One of the best solutions for our buildings is energy efficiency. It’s substantially cheaper to reduce the energy used by buildings than to provide them extra renewable power. Insulating roofs and windows, replacing old appliances and installing programmable thermostats are all retrofits that can go a long way to improving existing buildings.

New construction can use net zero energy standards so buildings produce more energy than they require. All new structures should be built to that benchmark and existing ones must receive energy efficiency retrofits before it can be sold.

Equally important are the materials we use to make buildings. Cement and steel make up about three per cent of Canada’s emissions due to the chemical processes involved in their production. Substituting these polluting products with wood from sustainably managed forests and other organic materials could actually make construction beneficial for the climate and create jobs. Of course the catch is we can only harvest from our forests and fields what’s ecologically sound — so we better put it to good use.

Canada should lead the way and mandate this for all new construction. On a global scale, such a move could reduce emissions by 31 per cent.

GROWING OUR CLIMATE SOLUTIONS

Industrial agriculture and forestry use fossil fuels while pumping carbon into the atmosphere in the process. It doesn’t have to be that way. Best practices that prioritize climate concerns can make these sectors part of the solution.

Agricultural producers can store more carbon in soils and reduce pollution of methane and nitrous oxide — two powerful greenhouse gases.

Moving to no-tillage farming and planting clover or grasses over winter can help keep carbon from being lost when soil is tilled. Reducing nitrogen fertilizer use, moving away from cattle feedlots and capturing gas from waste products can slash the climate impact of agriculture.

Climate-smart agriculture without single crop fields and fertilizer can increase yields, cut emissions and better protect farmers from climate change.

Meanwhile, mandates for urban agriculture and composting can cut the climate impact of our food. Canada is currently developing a national food policy which must transform agriculture from pollution to solution and ensure our food security in a warming world.

While we slash pollution, the role of Canada’s forests in absorbing carbon can’t be forgotten. Trees capture and store carbon, and if better protected and better managed, forests can be climate-change heroes.

British Columbia and Ontario are both working on plans to safeguard the carbon stored in their forests, but there are real risks to their approach. They want to put a price on this naturally-occurring process to justify pollution elsewhere — this is not a climate solution.

Governments should protect old-growth forests and wetlands to maintain their carbon stores and manage harvesting of second-growth to maximize storage. We must eliminate slash burning, where piles of forest debris are burned after clearcutting, and find other ways to use this waste. We should also enable more permanent uses of wood, requiring all disposable wood products to be made from 100 per cent recycled fibre.

We’ve obliterated the natural cycle of carbon between plants and the air, and governments must work to restore it. Agriculture and forestry can play a key role in removing some of that pollution.
Waste of time changing the atmosphere without even trying, surely we can change the economy if we set our minds to it.

Photo left: A Wilderness Committee stand at the 2016 Earth Day parade, Lower Mainland, BC

Photo right: Polar bear on melting ice, Nunavut

Photo: First Nations’ chief stands on top of solar panel pasted with ice. (Michael Marantzik)

WildernessCommittee.org • 1-800-661-WILD (9453)

YES!
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PROVINCE    POSTAL CODE

EMAIL  Yes, send me updates via email

Email my tax receipt.

Yes, I would like to keep the Earth Day parade in 2015 in BC (Michael Marantzik).