



Culpeper and Tanner: Canada is losing the fight against climate calamity

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In this image made from video and provided by SevereStudios.com, damage from Hurricane Michael is seen in Mexico Beach, Fla. on Thursday, Oct. 11, 2018. AP

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Three things are conspicuously weak in Canada's strategy to combat climate change: We have insufficient resolve to reduce the supply and consumption of fossil fuels; we need better incentives to promote the development of and shift to renewable energy; and national and provincial plans to prepare for catastrophic weather extremes are absent. The urgency to act cannot be exaggerated. According to the most recent report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, global average surface temperatures are "likely to reach" the critical 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels as early as 2030 at current rates of net emission.

In December 2015, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau joined leaders from around the world in Paris to set goals to reduce carbon pollution, in an effort to keep the global temperature at a level safe for human life. Scientists are now warning that those goals are inadequate. Yet after three years under the Trudeau government, Canada has no chance of meeting even the much less ambitious target for emission reduction established by prime minister Stephen Harper, under whose watch Canada was called a "climate laggard."

Every increment of global warming will produce more climate chaos, and disorder to life as we know it on the planet, in the form of ocean acidification, rising sea levels, species extinction and climate refugees. To tackle these threats, we must end fossil fuel subsidies, and the expansion of fossil fuel production, including the oilsands. In Canada, the Trans-Mountain Pipeline and other fossil fuel infrastructure (including the LNG pipeline recently approved by British Columbia) represent huge leaps backward in our mitigation efforts. While enhanced carbon pricing is essential to foster the transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy, by itself it is not sufficient to mitigate the causes of climate change. However, we specifically support the federal government's plan for a national carbon tax in the face of a seemingly growing chorus of opposition.

Climate change is already here, and further impacts are now inevitable. While we must continue to tackle the causes, we also need to strengthen resilience to the impacts of climate change. We need smart, flexible electrical grids, zoning to prohibit building on flood plains, updated building standards, retrofits to make current housing stock more resistant to floods and high winds, and emergency medical plans. The increasing frequency and intensity of extreme weather events have also made it pitifully clear that we are not adequately prepared.

Canada urgently needs, but lacks, a plan. According to a report released by the Auditor General in March, most governments in Canada have not fully assessed climate change risks and have not developed detailed adaptation plans.

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Developing countries also need adaptation plans but have limited means to create them. No matter how devastating recent weather events in Canada have been, they have been far more overwhelming in developing countries in terms of significant loss of life and property damage. Moreover, the poorest countries are far less to blame for causing climate change, having generated far less carbon pollution than rich countries. For this reason, countries such as Canada have an obligation to assist the developing countries.

Under the Paris Accord, a target of \$100 billion (which is far from adequate) was set for this purpose but, lamentably, only \$5 billion has been mobilized. Canada's fair share would be around \$4 billion. Canada currently spends a paltry 0.26 per cent of Gross National Income on official development assistance, far below the international target of 0.7 percent and below the average performance of all donors. There is obviously room for Canada to allocate more foreign aid to help developing countries build their resilience against climate change.

Carbon pollution increasingly costs everyone. Governments around the world are not acting fast enough. We must press our governments to act with more ambition and take the lead both in attacking the causes of continued carbon pollution and preparing Canada and the world for the challenges of climate change now and in the future.

Roy Culpeper is Chair of the Group of 78, and Susan Tanner is the Chair of the recent G78 Conference on "Meeting the Climate Challenge: Accelerating the Transition to a Zero-Carbon Economy."