Wilkinson Column December 16.20

Optimism after a tough year

As we approach the close of this difficult year, I'm grateful for an increasing feeling of optimism.

There's the ray of hope provided by last week's vaccine news, but more than that, my optimism is fueled by my sense that this devastating pandemic is having an impact on the other crisis threatening our health and security – namely, climate change.

I believe COVID-19 has focused all of us on some basic truths that are providing an overdue catalyst to meaningful, impactful climate action – both in our country and abroad. We've been reminded how vulnerable we humans are in the natural order of things, what we can achieve when we come together with focus and determination, and the wisdom of listening to science.

This past Saturday, the world marked the fifth anniversary of the Paris Agreement - a landmark achievement which brought nearly 200 nations into a common cause to undertake ambitious efforts to contain global warming and adapt to its effects.

The Paris Agreement was the spark for our government to work with Canadians to launch Canada's first national climate plan. The "Pan-Canadian Framework on Clean Growth and Climate" included a price on pollution, a plan to phase-out coal by 2030 and unprecedented investments in public transit, zero-emission vehicles, nature and renewable energy. We have made enormous progress but, as the science tells us, not yet enough to ward off the worst impacts of global warming in the years ahead.

Strengthened climate plan

That's why, in my capacity as Minister of Environment and Climate Change, I spent the better part of this past year working to develop and bring forward a strengthened and detailed climate plan for Canada, which I was pleased to launch with the Prime Minister last Friday.

It's a $15 billion plan that puts Canadians on track to exceed our 2030 Paris emissions reduction target, establish the building blocks for Canada to be carbon neutral by 2050 and create long-term jobs and sustainable communities in every region of the country.

Climate change is the most significant long-term threat of our generation, but it is also our greatest opportunity. If there's any good gusted in on COVID-19'S ill wind, it's the fact that we need a plan for a post-pandemic economy. We know that cleaner economies will be stronger, grow faster and create more good jobs for people. Our largest trading partners and economic competitors are all moving in this direction, and Canadians rightly expect we won't be left behind. It is within our reach to achieve both our environmental expectations and our economic ambitions.

Fighting climate change like COVID

Imagine what we could do if we confronted climate change with the same urgency, resolve, science-based decision-making and all-of-Canada effort that we are bringing to our fight against COVID-19.

The annual Climate Change Performance Index (CCPI) released last week provided sobering testimony to just how far the world still needs to travel down the low-carbon road if we're to slow the rapid warming of our planet. But the CCPI also had some positive news. More than half the nations surveyed - representing 90 per cent of the world' greenhouse gas emissions - have dedicated post-pandemic economic recovery spending to green initiatives.

Let's walk the road together to make Canada an investment destination-of-choice for low-carbon solutions that meet our global climate responsibilities.

I entered politics largely because of my concern about the environmental crisis that is climate change, as well as my belief that Canada needed to have a thoughtful economic strategy that would ensure our continued prosperity in a low-carbon future. I was concerned about these issues as a citizen of this country and of this planet – but perhaps I was most concerned about these issues as the father of two young daughters.

This is a plan for all of us, but it's of particular importance to Canada's youth. This is about ensuring that a sustainable and a prosperous future is one that is attainable for them.

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