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A Sobering Reality with Reasons for Optimism

Last week I attended the Globe Forum here in Vancouver - one of the largest global gatherings focused on climate change and sustainability, now in its 30th year. The content of the forum was sobering in some respects. However, the discussions that took place also offered reasons for optimism.

Current Reality

The latest report from the International Science Panel on Climate Change underlines that human activities have already caused 1.0°C of global warming above pre-industrial levels. If global emission levels continue in line with current Paris commitments, the world will see a rise of more than 3 degrees of warming by 2100.

Such a temperature rise would be catastrophic, generating impacts such as weather extremes and significant sea level rise. It is no wonder that youth around the world are fed up with older generations not aggressively acting on the science before us.

I am the father of two daughters. My youngest, in Grade 12, comes home many evenings and says, "Dad, you need to be doing more to fight climate change." Her words motivate me in what I do as an MP, and as Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

During the 2019 election, Canadians overwhelmingly voted for political parties that promised ambitious action on climate change. Our government's election platform reflected those concerns. We committed to exceeding our 2030 target of 30% below 2005 levels, and to achieving net-zero emissions by 2050.

Between 2015 and 2019, Canadians made significant progress addressing greenhouse gas emissions. We developed the first real climate plan Canada has ever had. It contains over 50 different measures – from phasing out coal, to major investments in public transit and electric vehicle infrastructure, to energy efficiency in buildings. We invested over \$3 billion to scale up clean technology and we put in place a national price on carbon pollution.

Some Positive Signs

We are now seeing some positive trends:

- Global carbon emissions were flat in 2019, despite expectations of an increase. This included a significant decrease in emissions from developed economies;

- Natural gas produced more electricity than coal for the first time ever and wind-powered electricity was nearly equal to coal-fired electricity;
- Here at home, we are now seeing declines in Canada's absolute emissions – a major step forward that will provide us with momentum to accelerate our efforts.

However, despite major emissions reductions to 2030 identified in Canada's climate plan, we still require a further 77 megatonnes of reductions to achieve the current 2030 target. By comparison, that is equivalent to all emissions from Quebec last year.

Meeting and exceeding our 2030 target will be challenging. Developing an effective plan to achieve net-zero by 2050 will be even harder, given our vast geography, northern climate and resource economy.

Optimism and Opportunity

What is exciting about the net-zero goal is the conversations this enables with all Canadians around pathways for achievement. Achieving net-zero requires an economic as well as an environmental transformation. No one has a step-by-step guide to net-zero. In the short term, we will engage experts and all Canadians to create effective pathways.

Certainly one element will be a focus on clean technology. A focus on clean tech is not a climate strategy; however, a thoughtful approach to clean tech must be part of any effective strategy to get to net-zero – and to help us to decarbonize key sectors of our economy.

Clean tech is also a key component of an economic strategy for the future. Countries that lead in the development of technologies, solutions and services that enable a rapid and successful energy transition, will create jobs and economic prosperity for their citizens. Canada can be a global leader – in fact, in a number of areas, we already are.

Climate change is the existential challenge of our age. The discussions that took place at Globe last week are part of our ongoing collective effort to ensure we leave a healthy, sustainable and prosperous world for future generations.

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