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“Building back better” after Covid-19

I was pleased to take part last week in a virtual townhall, organized by a group of North Vancouver parents and youth concerned about the impact of climate change.

Marian Hakze is one of those parents. A few months ago, Marian joined *For Our Kids* – a growing, grassroots network of parents from across the country committed to working collectively to advocate for action on climate change.

“As a parent,” she wrote, “I could no longer ignore the terrifying scenarios - extreme weather, severe and frequent fires, food and global insecurity – predicted in the near and long term. I knew I could not say to my children that I didn’t know, didn’t care or didn’t do anything to stop climate change.”

The focus of last week’s townhall was “A Green and Just Recovery” - how we look to build back from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Over the past number of months, the focus of federal and provincial governments has rightly been on mitigating the health and economic impacts of COVID-19. However, we have – at least for now – moved through the phase of flattening the curve, and are now in a phase of gradual and cautious re-opening and contemplating what recovery can and should look like. It is an opportunity to take a step back and consider the type of society we ideally want to work to create.

Looming locomotives

Certainly, there are numerous issues that COVID-19 has highlighted – such as medical supply chains and the state of care homes – that will need to be addressed going forward.

However, it is crystal clear that any recovery must address the twin crises looming like slow-moving locomotives coming down the track – climate change and the global decline in biodiversity. These threats will have devastating impacts if not addressed aggressively and soon. The choices we make as we consider how best to recover and “build back better” must account for continued and accelerated action on climate and biodiversity issues.

These critical issues have been priorities for this federal government since it was elected in 2015. However, I think most everyone

recognizes that more action is urgently required – a fact this government recognized in committing itself to exceeding Canada’s current Paris target and to achieve a net zero carbon emissions status by 2050.

Short-term measures that will enable Canada to begin the task of building back better are certainly vital, but I would caution against placing our focus only on short-term actions. Short, medium and long-term actions and initiatives are required in Canada and around the world to achieve the net-zero future that scientists tell us we must.

Some crucial initiatives are already underway – including phasing out coal-fired electricity generation by 2030, investing in zero-emission vehicle infrastructure and purchase incentives to make it easier for Canadians to reduce their transportation emissions, and developing net-zero energy building codes to ensure new homes are ready for a low-carbon future. We do, though, need significant additional action in areas that produce the greatest volume of our domestic emissions: transportation, industry, buildings and power generation.

We all must play a part

To be effective, such action will require imagination, commitment and collaboration between all levels of government, Indigenous leaders, the private sector, environmental activists and individual Canadians – including grassroots groups like *For Our Kids*.

We will need strong, active voices pressing governments at all levels to do more. At the end of the day, climate change should not be a partisan issue – it is a science issue. Right now, regrettably, this is not always the case.

What will change this is continued growth in public support demanding aggressive climate action – the kind of public mobilization and unity of cause that we have seen in the inspiring ways Canadians have come together to deal with COVID-19.

This wrenching pandemic is teaching us much about what Canadians are capable of doing together in times of crisis. Let us re-commit to meeting the challenge of the climate crisis with that in mind.

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