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Canada's modern nation-building opportunity

Nation-building projects begin with a vision. Without it, obstacles can seem like impassable mountains – much like the Rockies did to Canada's railway builders in the 19th century. It was the vision of a prosperous future enabled by the railway that powered them forward against seemingly impossible odds.

Today, Canadians are facing a nation-building opportunity for the 21st century that is unprecedented in scale and importance. Once again, a compelling vision is essential to mobilize and inspire the “all-of-Canada” effort necessary to achieve this project's ambitious – perhaps even audacious – goals.

Earlier this month, against the backdrop of the worst wildfire season in BC's history, I released “Powering Canada Forward,” the government of Canada's vision document for the modernization of Canada's electricity sector. This massive and complex undertaking will form the backbone of our strategy to achieve Canada's climate goals and to safeguard a prosperous future for this country.

Ensuring access to affordable, reliable, clean electricity is a critical step in driving down the greenhouse gas emissions that cause climate change, while seizing the massive economic opportunities that will be enabled through the shift to a global low-carbon future.

The future we desire

An inspiring vision captures the imagination by focusing on the future we desire: a clean, net-zero electricity system by 2035, and the doubling or tripling of supply by 2050, that retains Canada's strategic clean electricity competitiveness and meets increased demand as we plug our cars, homes and industries into the grid.

The metaphor of the obstacles the Rockies posed to the railway in the 19th century is helpful. The mountains we will need to overcome are slow approval processes, labour shortages, supply

chain upheavals, jurisdictional politics, competition for critical minerals and geopolitical uncertainty – to name a few.

Realizing the vision will require exceptional policy coherence, investment mobilization, technological flair, and the commitment of all levels of civil society.

The required public funding is mind-boggling and is needed while government simultaneously addresses a housing supply and affordability crisis as well as rising health care costs. The challenges are enormous and not for the faint of heart.

Head start

The good news is that Canada already has a head start. In this country, we are fortunate to possess an electricity grid that is already more than 80% non-emitting. Canada as a country has the advantage of being several steps ahead of many – including our American friends - in this respect.

It is important to recognize that every province, every territory, every Indigenous community has unique circumstances, challenges, and requirements. There will need to be different pathways to achieving the clean grid of the future. And it is critical that we work collaboratively and boldly to ensure that electricity in every region of this country is reliable, affordable, non-emitting and abundant.

Clean energy is at the heart of achieving our environmental and our economic ambitions. The critical importance and the increasingly broad scope of the energy conversation is a key reason why the Prime Minister recently changed the name of my ministerial title to “Minister of Energy and Natural Resources”.

The vision document I released earlier this month represents an invitation to Canadians to engage in this conversation and to help us all shape our path forward. This is not a matter for government alone. We all have a stake in the outcome of our latest and most important nation-building exercise.

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