



CCPA

research for communities

CANADIAN CENTRE FOR POLICY ALTERNATIVES - MANITOBA

OCTOBER 2018

Manitoba's Climate & Green Plan: Catastrophic Failure of Leadership

Last week, the Manitoba government announced it would amend Bill 16, the “Climate and Green Plan,” to eliminate its flat \$25/tonne carbon tax, leaving it essentially empty of any real action on climate change. Just a few days later, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)—the UN body in charge of informing policy-makers about the science of climate change—issued a landmark report saying that without urgent and unprecedented action to rapidly bring down greenhouse gas emissions in the next dozen years, we will face catastrophic consequences. The contrast between the call by the UN to rise to our moral responsibility to mitigate climate change, and Premier Pallister’s gutting of the already-too-weak Bill 16 couldn’t be more jarring, or speak any louder about the failure of leadership in our province.

Climate change is the defining challenge of our time. Dealing with climate change is not equivalent to, say, achieving a balanced budget—whatever the merits of that goal, but about the survival of entire species and hundreds of millions of human lives. The statement about staking our future is easy to let wash off, because we hear it so frequently. But in this case, it is not catastrophism or scare-mongering. It is a clear-eyed reckoning with the increasingly ominous signals being read by a

vast community of earth and climate scientists, and by people on the front lines of warming. So, we have an array of facts before us as follows, some of which are, to the government’s credit, palely reflected in the preamble to Bill 16.

- 1) Climate change is manifesting itself now. Model projections for many of the consequences of warming have proven conservative in terms of their timing and scale. This is not a fight we can put off—and in fact we should have been engaging in it decades ago. We are late as it is.
- 2) The consequences of our failure to engage meaningfully are difficult to overstate. They are too many to list here, but to summarize the vast field of research on this, they are civilizational in scale. Should we continue to pussy-foot around climate change, there will be hundreds of millions of victims—victims of dislocation, sickness, and death. Already, just to take one small indicator, the World Bank estimates that there will be 140 million internally displaced people resulting from climate change by 2050, and millions more internationally. Also of note for those whose pulse is quickened by costs expressed in dollar figures, rather than human lives and ecological destruction, is that we’ll

CCPA-MB

205-765 Main St.
Winnipeg, MB
R2W 3N5

PHONE

204.927.3200

EMAIL

CCPAMB@
POLICYALTERNATIVES.CA

WEBSITE

WWW.
POLICYALTERNATIVES.CA

BLOG

WWW.POLICYFIX.CA

TWITTER

@CCPAMB

RESEARCH - ANALYSIS - SOLUTIONS

be knocking 13% off of global GDP by 2100, even sticking to a 2 degree target. The costs of adapting to increased severe weather run into the hundreds of billions. A failure to comply with the goal of keeping the world below a 1.5 degree average warming will result in much, much worse. A conservative estimate of the global costs of just coastal flooding is \$14 trillion.

3) We are well aware of what's causing this. The hard math that drives the arithmetic of climate change is unforgiving and unambiguous. The IPCC's carbon budget makes it as plain as it can be. If we continue to allow people to dig up and burn fossil fuels without a clear and rapid plan to transition off of them we are headed for catastrophe.

What these facts mean together is that in refusing to hold to account those responsible for continuing to pump out greenhouse gases we are knowingly contributing to the dislocation, misery and death of hundreds of millions around the world. It is happening now and will accelerate in the near future. These are not comfortable facts, and a less comfortable conclusion, but they are unassailable, and confronting them is the burden of leadership.

Leadership is required here because a meaningful response to climate change (despite the Climate Plan's repetition of the myth that for individuals, there is "always a greener choice") actually requires collective, policy-led changes. Getting off of fossil-fuels—an absolutely necessary condition of staving off the consequences we have been warned about and are now beginning to experience—does not entail individual decisions to simply turn off the carbon tap, because our economies, our physical infrastructure, and the ways we move ourselves, feed ourselves, and keep warm are soaked in oil. We often hear people who point out this reality go on to

say "so, fossil fuels will be a part of how we do things for a long time yet," and certainly many organizations behave as though that's true. Large emitters will continue to behave that way unless compelled to do otherwise. Fortunately, there are feasible, though difficult at this point, ways of transitioning off fossil fuels.

These can and should entail the up-skilling of workers in currently high-carbon sectors, as, for example, oil patch workers in Alberta are doing through the organization Iron and Earth, and the protection of low-income families who will have some of the costs of transition passed onto them. Some cities and states elsewhere are showing what can be done: Paris' climate plan, to take just one example, has over 500 initiatives to make it a vibrant, livable, carbon-neutral city by 2050. Local and sub-national governments are using public purchasing power to encourage transitions to low carbon vehicles, investing in efficient public and active transportation to move people through our cities, encouraging zero-carbon energy systems through targeted public investment, providing subsidies or support for demand side energy management, retraining workers in carbon-intensive sectors like pipeline construction, putting them to work in good jobs building the new infrastructure required for a zero-carbon economy, and providing research and extension for zero-emissions or net-negative agriculture. These bottom-line requirements of our collective responsibility for climate change require policy leadership.

If the "Climate and Green Plan" is the sum total of Manitoba's response—and so far it seems to be—it represents an epic, even catastrophic failure of such leadership. If we are in a fight with cli-

mate change, we're sending a kindergartner out against a title fighter, and should only expect a beating.

There was much to say about the insufficiency and poor design of the carbon tax that initially appeared in Bill 16, but which has now been cut out. It was utterly insufficient to produce any meaningful change, had no plan to use revenues in innovative ways to encourage a shift off of fossil fuels, and failed to protect low-income Manitobans from regressive effects. However, it was a signal that Manitoba was at least willing to take a baby step. With the removal of the carbon tax, we now have a bill utterly devoid of significance or effect.

Of course, Manitoba is not in this alone. We are, on the grand scale of greenhouse gas emissions, a small player. We contribute about 3% of the national total, and Canada as a whole emits about 1.6% of the global total. That's not to say we are carbon-pinchers. On a consumption basis, Canada is the 9th largest emitter globally. Per capita, each Canadian in 2016 contributed over 20 tons of CO₂—masking huge regional inequality, with Alberta pumping out by far the lion's share. Premier Pallister justified the removal of the carbon tax by saying that we should be given credit for our investments in Hydro. Our electricity source is, indeed, relatively low-carbon. Yet still in 2016 Manitobans managed to produce about 16 tons of CO₂ equivalent per person—well over 10 times the global equitable level. Looking at territorial emissions, our neighbours to the east in Ontario and Quebec perform much better. Our emissions from agriculture, after some small progress from 2008-11, have been on the rise since, and are almost 40% higher than they were in 1990. On transportation, our other major emissions source, emissions from

1990 are up as well, almost 70%. There is simply no basis for the claim that we are already pulling our weight—and one can only imagine how such claims are heard in a place like Tuvalu, being swallowed by rising seas, by people in the Philippines, hammered by superstorms made more powerful and frequent by climate change, or in the arctic, which has already warmed 3.5 degrees on average since the beginning of this century, and where communities are slumping into the sea.

Due to our small size, we might say that there are others who should be leading the way—others who are more culpable than us. The problem with this logic is well-known, and derives from the global and collective nature of climate change. The necessary political condition for a coordinated and global response to climate change—one that is adequate to the enormous nature of the challenge—is visible cooperation. Everyone must see that everyone else is pulling as hard as they can pull toward the objective. Laggards—the most obvious being the Trump administration in the US, but also the Manitoba government's comrades in resisting climate action, like Premier Doug Ford and Opposition Leader Jason Kenney—don't just undermine the project through their refusal to reduce their own emissions. They undermine it by signaling that efforts won't be reciprocated, encouraging others to minimize their efforts in turn. While we can't do anything about Mr. Trump and his Canadian counterparts, we can send a different signal—one that demonstrates that we are willing to lead, rather than foot-drag.

If everybody follows the climate resisters' lead, the logical endpoint is crystal clear. A provincial government concerned enough about the deficit situation to

cut funding to education and health care should be very concerned about the ballooning future costs to the public of adapting to the 3.2 degree warming forecast for this province under even a low-carbon scenario. Now is not the time for penny wise, dollar foolish public policy. If we peg our ambition to those who do nothing to combat climate change, the future economic costs will be astronomical.

The global effort to combat climate change is already well behind schedule. Funding for mitigation and adaptation has not materialized. Reductions are less than needed. This global effort, of course, is composed entirely of policies and programs like this one. It is ultimately legislation and action at local levels that make up the global effort.

Refusal to join this fight is not protecting Manitobans. It consigns us to an unsustainable and laggard economy from which future investment will shy. In June, a group of 288 global institutional investors controlling \$26 trillion in assets called the G-7 members out for their lack of ambitious climate change action. Investors are looking for policy environments in which green investment is welcome. The Manitoba government's stance on climate change generally and its withdrawal of the carbon tax in particular not only costs us millions in the short term, but sends a loud signal that Manitobans prefer to stick with the fading and destructive fossil economy of the 20th Century.

It is well past time to acknowledge the stakes of climate change not in substance-less preambles but in the form of policy that will actually make a difference. The current generation should not have to face the 3 degree average warmed world in store should governments limit themselves to the current national pledges under the Paris Agreement. Nor should our children have to deal with the 6 degree warmer planet that we are actually on target to realize, as governments put forward tragically insufficient legislation like Bill 16. I

urge this government to look straight on at these stakes, acknowledge our moral responsibility in doing our part to avert the worst, and to deliver to Manitobans a piece of legislation that intends to make a meaningful contribution. That contribution should embrace and support a just transition off of fossil fuels, help us move toward a 21st century economy, and be reflective of our unwillingness to make others suffer on our behalf.

Mark Hudson, *CCPA-Manitoba Research Associate; Associate Professor of Sociology, University of Manitoba.*

This article is Hudson's committee presentation on Bill 16: The Climate and Green Plan. A Fully referenced version available upon request.

CCPA-MB

205 - 765 Main St.
Winnipeg, MB
R2W 3N5

PHONE

204.927.3200

EMAIL

CCPAMB@
POLICYALTERNATIVES.CA

WEBSITE

WWW.
POLICYALTERNATIVES.CA

BLOG

WWW.POLICYFIX.CA

TWITTER

@CCPAMB