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briefing note

BACKGROUND

ALL OVER THE MAP 2012: A comparison of provincial climate change plans

Fate of ecosystems and global economy depends on choices we make today

Facing the challenge of climate change, leading provinces are prioritizing clean-energy policies that Canadians recognize are vital in the transition from the overuse of fossil fuels to a cleaner, more innovative economy. These provinces show that Canada could make progress and become a world leader in solving global warming if the federal government joined forces.

Scientific reports conclude that over the past few years the risks associated with uncontrolled climate change are greater and more costly (both economically and in human lives), and that quick and more effective solutions to heat-trapping emissions are needed to sustain the health of ecosystems and the global economy.

Canada could be making a positive contribution in the fight against climate change. Environmental factors notwithstanding, there is an economic impetus. The best research shows that strong action to dramatically reduce Canada's emissions, while preserving a strong economy, and strong job growth is possible. And, as the Stern Review shows, the economic costs of inaction are much greater than the economic costs of tackling the challenge head on.

Weak federal programs

Despite the evidence for the serious impacts of climate change and the economic data that show action is possible and warranted, the Canadian government continues to abandon its responsibility on climate change action. In most cases, federal programs, even when they exist, are ineffective and getting weaker. In an October 2011 review by the Office of the Auditor General of Canada, the Environment Commissioner reported that the federal government's strategy is "disjointed, confused and non transparent" and that, overall, the government's policies are now projected to be 90 per cent weaker than they were in 2007.

Provincial leaders

Considering the urgency, it should be encouraging that many provinces and territories are implementing more ambitious climate change policies. As in the U.S., where California and other states began acting long before Washington, a number of provincial governments are filling the leadership void with breakthrough policies and targets from

which important lessons can be learned and shared. Leading provinces are prioritizing clean-energy policies and proving that Canada could make progress and become a world leader in solving global warming if the federal government came aboard:

- Both B.C. and Quebec have introduced economic incentives to shift to cleaner choices through carbon taxes and Quebec has moved to cap and reduce industrial emissions. The B.C. carbon tax has now reached \$25 per tonne of carbon emissions and will increase to \$30 this year, heightening the incentive to reduce fossil fuel consumption and invest in energy-efficiency and clean energy production.
- Three provinces — Ontario, New Brunswick and Manitoba — have shut down polluting power plants, and have promised more shutdowns.
- Ontario's revolutionary Green Energy and Economy Act has already resulted in billions of investment dollars in clean energy production and created thousands of jobs.
- Quebec and B.C. have also regulated vehicle fuel-efficiency in line with California standards (a much stronger approach than the Canadian federal government's plan).
- Three provinces, representing 75 per cent of Canada's population, have made commitments to establish cap-and-trade systems: Quebec has moved forward with the January 2012 launch of the Western Climate Initiative, with B.C. and Ontario preparing to follow. Canadian provinces have set more ambitious goals for reducing industrial greenhouse gas pollution than the participating U.S. states. Nova Scotia has already capped its electricity emissions, responsible for almost half of the province's emissions.
- Six provinces and territories have either strengthened their building codes in order to make new buildings much more energy efficient or have announced that they will do so in the near future.

Provincial laggards

This trend is not, however, universal. Other provinces and territories are taking a more piecemeal approach, with some actually going backwards.

With the country's highest emissions, and relatively weak laws and incentives for clean energy, Saskatchewan and Alberta remain at the bottom. These two provinces are the main drivers of Canada's rising emissions because of continued reliance on polluting fossil fuel industries. For example, emissions from the oil sands are projected to triple in the next decade unless leadership is taken. Environment Canada documents show that the oil sands will be responsible for 95 per cent of Canada's growth in industrial greenhouse gas pollution over the next decade if nothing is done to curtail them. This doesn't include emissions from coal-fired power plants that are still being built in Alberta.

David Suzuki Foundation Ranking

For a description on changes since 2008 provincial ranking see page 13 of report.

Best	None
Very Good	Ontario Quebec British Columbia
Good	Nova Scotia Prince Edward Island
Fair	Manitoba New Brunswick Northwest Territories
Poor	Newfoundland and Labrador Nunavut Yukon
Worst	Alberta Saskatchewan

Emission challenges

According to the most recent figures available from Environment Canada, provinces and territories reduced greenhouse gas emissions in 2009. Unfortunately, this country-wide decrease in emissions is not because of a national policy or a federal decision to invest in clean energy, rather it is associated with the economic downturn of 2008/2009 and is therefore illusory and likely to reverse with the economic recovery. However, in some cases, such as Ontario's closure of coal-fired power plants, gains will be maintained.

But two trends do cause serious concern.

The first is the rush to exploit (as quickly as possible) oil and gas resources in all jurisdictions, including unconventional forms such as shale gas. This is most notable in the case of Alberta's development of the oil sands, undertaken despite the incredible social and environmental toll (local air pollution, greenhouse gas emissions, water pollution, impacts on human health, impacts on wildlife and biodiversity, high use of fresh water).

The second cause for concern is the complete lack of progress on reversing emissions from road transportation (with the exception of cities like Vancouver). In many jurisdictions, this remains one of the largest sources of greenhouse gas emissions. Though modest commitments and investments have been made in sustainable forms of transportation, including transit and biking, no government has adequately tackled the issue of urban sprawl — a major cause of the problem.

However, in analyzing Canada's global warming emissions over a three-year period a more promising trend surfaces: eight of thirteen provinces and territories have made progress in reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Clearly, no province is doing as much as it could and provincial targets remain below what the science says is necessary, but a lot is happening to create a critical mass.

A comprehensive plan

What Canada needs is a full suite of policies to tackle all sources of greenhouse gases. In each case, technologies already exist to dramatically cut emissions. The only missing ingredient is political leadership. Those actions and policies include:

- Spurring clean energy and innovation by introducing a price for greenhouse gas emissions;
- Addressing growing road transportation emissions by mobilizing a sustainable transportation network;
- Re-energizing our homes and buildings by adopting the most energy-efficient new and existing building codes in the world;
- Prioritizing clean energy with incentives and laws;
- Implementing agricultural programs to reduce emissions from soil, such as low- or zero-till partnerships between government and farmers;
- Regulations to ensure all landfills are capped, with the captured methane used for energy;
- Regulations to address emissions from the oil and gas sector.

Provincial highlights

BRITISH COLUMBIA

Strengths

- Full climate change action plan with target to reduce greenhouse gas pollution by 33 per cent below 2007 levels by 2020.
- Carbon tax, now \$25 per tonne, will go up by \$5 per tonne in 2012, and applies to three quarters of B.C.'s emissions.
- Municipalities required to set targets and develop plans to reduce GHG emissions.

Weaknesses

- Subsidies to oil and gas sector and plans to develop shale gas and a potential gas-powered Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) plant terminal make carbon emission reductions more difficult.
- Lacks strong safeguards to ensure renewable energy is low-impact and supported by local communities.
- Ambitious public transit plan in question because of lack of financial support from the province.

Near-term opportunity

The B.C. government should:

- Strengthen the carbon tax by setting a long-term price on carbon pollution beyond 2012, improve the fairness of the tax by increasing the low-income tax credit in step with annual increases, expand the application of the carbon tax to include industrial process emissions (through the existing carbon tax at least until an equivalent cap-and-trade system is in place), and dedicate a portion of revenues (on a regional basis) to green infrastructure such as transit.

ALBERTA

Strengths

- Met its goal to have 12.5 per cent of its total electricity by 2008 generated from renewable and alternative sources (primarily hydro, wind and biomass).
- Establishing a Climate Change Action Centre to help municipalities increase energy efficiency.
- \$2 billion committed for GreenTRIP public transit initiative.

Weaknesses

- Climate strategy allows Alberta's GHG emissions to keep growing until 2020, and a recent analysis of the plan concludes that the province will likely only achieve one third of its emission reduction goal for 2020.
- Strategy assumes 70 per cent of greenhouse gas emission reductions after 2020 will be achieved through expensive and unproven carbon capture and storage (CCS) technology while the province fails to support the policies to spur required innovation and clean technology deployment.
- Alberta's \$15 per tonne partial carbon price (Specified Gas Emitter Regulation) applies to only 12 per cent of emissions from large industrial polluters reducing the equivalent incentive for clean energy (carbon price) to less than \$5 per tonne of emissions. (This is well short of the \$95 to \$255 per tonne cost estimate for CCS technology that forms the foundation of the Alberta government's plan.)
- No effective plan to reduce coal-fired power, which is responsible for approximately 82 per cent of Alberta's electricity generation.

Near-term Opportunity

The Alberta government should:

- Abandon the weak emission intensity-based regulation for large industrial emitters including the use of offset credits for compliance. Instead apply the current partial carbon levy to every tonne of GHG emissions. The price of carbon needs to increase quickly from (the partial) \$15 per tonne carbon price to reach \$200 per tonne by 2020 to achieve the deep emission reductions scientists say are needed to avert dangerous climate change. This is in line with the government's Energy Strategy commitment to "review its emissions targets and carbon charges for large industrial facilities, and ensure appropriate increases are made to both."

SASKATCHEWAN

Strengths

- Announced plans to more than double the province's wind capacity.
- Renewed funding for residential energy-efficiency improvements.

Weaknesses

- Greenhouse gas emission reduction targets for 2020 reduced from 32 per cent below 2004 levels to 20 per cent below 2006 levels.
- Only 29 per cent of emissions covered by proposed regulations.
- Eliminated both Climate Change Secretariat and Office of Energy Conservation.
- Substantial cuts to renewable energy programs.
- No plan to end overreliance on coal-fired power plants.

Near-term opportunity

The Saskatchewan government should:

- Establish a cap-and-trade system that regulates emission reductions from all heavy industry and is supported by a strong emission target, and remove loopholes by eliminating or strictly limiting the use of carbon offsets.
- Re-establish all the funding for renewable energy, energy conservation and methane-gas capture that has been eliminated, and then further enhance it.

MANITOBA

Strengths

- Effectively shut down the province's only coal-fired power plant by banning non-emergency use of coal.
- Adopted standards for large appliances, Power Smart programs and a strong green building strategy.

Weaknesses

- In 2008, the Manitoba government lowered its GHG emission reduction target from 18 per cent below 1990 by 2010 (with the possibility of achieving 23 per cent reductions by 2012) to 6 per cent below 1990 by 2012. According to Manitoba's auditor general, the current climate action plan is unlikely to meet even this reduced target.
- Manitoba reneged on its commitment to adopt California vehicle emission standards, ignoring the recommendation of its own Vehicle Standards Advisory Board.
- Failure to meaningfully tackle emissions from road transportation has resulted in substantial increases in car commuting and a decrease in the use of public transit.

Near-term Opportunity

The Manitoba government should:

- Look seriously at tackling emissions from agriculture and road transportation, the two greatest sources of greenhouse gases. Immediate steps it could and should take are:
 - Significantly increasing funding for and making mandatory its agricultural strategy to reduce emissions from agriculture and animal operations.
 - Implementing the recommendations of its own vehicle standards advisory board, including regulating vehicle fuel efficiency, so they are in line with California standards (as Quebec and B.C. have done) rather than rely on the very weak proposed federal standards.

ONTARIO

Strengths

- One of the more ambitious targets for reducing emissions by the year 2020 — 15 per cent reductions compared to 1990.
- Far-reaching Green Energy and Green Economy Act is spurring development of clean energy, innovation and jobs.
- Government-legislated shutdown of all coal-fired power plants by 2014.
- Introduced Far North Act to permanently protect about half of the province's north.

Weaknesses

- Current climate change action plan is very short on details.
- Lacks comprehensive carbon pricing policy but could move quickly to join Quebec and California and implement a cap-and-trade system as enabling legislation is in place.
- Still failing to address emissions from transportation.

Near-term opportunity

The Ontario government should:

- Make Ontario industry a leader in energy-efficiency and cutting-edge clean energy by enacting a cap-and-trade system for all industrial sectors in 2012 that supports the province's binding greenhouse gas emission target, with as high as possible level of auctioning for emission quotas and limiting the use of offsets.

QUEBEC

Strengths

- Strongest North American target for reducing GHG emissions (20 per cent below 1990 levels by 2020).
- Enacted regulations in January 2012 with state of California to cap and reduce industrial emissions; however, the rules will need to be strengthened over time to support the province's binding emission targets.

- Brought in California-level vehicle fuel-efficiency regulations in January 2010.

Weaknesses

- Current spending on transportation heavily favours highway expansion over public transit.
- The temporary hold (pending a full environmental impact study) on the sale of controversial shale gas exploration permits is an important first step, but if shale gas extraction is allowed to proceed, it will be unlikely, if not impossible, for the province to meet its climate change goals.

Near-term opportunities

The Quebec government should:

- Develop and release as quickly as possible an updated climate change action plan that would allow the province to reach its 2020 GHG target entirely within the province. Policy development should not pause while the plan is being developed. An energy strategy for 2015-2020 should also be published with new, increased targets on renewable energy implementation (as has been done in Ontario recently).
- Ramp up provincial investment for Quebec's public transit network to meet transit authorities' development and operational needs toward 2020. Immediately redirect proposed spending on highway expansion to sustainable transportation solutions and infrastructure. Maintain current proportion of green fund investment directed toward transit — 65 per cent — as revenues from the new cap and trade system increase available funding.

NEW BRUNSWICK

Strengths

- GHG emissions have been on a downward trend since 2001 and the province may be on track to meet its stated objective of reducing emissions back to 1990 levels by 2012.
- Closed the 50 megawatt Grand Lake coal plant in March 2010.
- 249 megawatts of wind power added to the electricity grid.

Weaknesses

- New Brunswick government keen to exploit shale gas.
- Targets for electricity from renewable sources (10 per cent by 2016) not ambitious.

Near-term opportunities

The New Brunswick government should:

- Put a moratorium on new oil and natural gas development or exploration licences until the province has been able to assess the full environmental implications. The moratorium should be kept in place unless wide public consultations show a high degree of support from New Brunswick citizens for oil and gas development, including those who will be most affected.

- Enact legislation to cap and reduce greenhouse gas emissions from power plants and the fossil fuel sector.

PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

Strengths

- Already exceeded target of reducing GHG emissions to 1990 levels.
- Energy strategy commits to doubling renewable energy portfolio standard from 15 per cent to 30 per cent by 2013.

Weaknesses

- Reneged on 2008 commitment to adopt “California-like” vehicle emissions standards, opting for lower Canada/U.S. federal fuel-efficiency standards.
- Has not implemented promised annual progress reports on GHG reduction efforts.

Near-term opportunity

The Prince Edward Island government should:

- Develop a plan and policy framework for addressing emissions from the transportation sector to be coordinated with the forthcoming land-use planning policy.

NOVA SCOTIA

Strengths

- Remains committed to reduce overall global warming emissions to 10 per cent below 1990 levels by 2020.
- Hard cap legislated on emissions from Nova Scotia Power Inc., mandating emissions decrease to 25 per cent below 2007 levels by 2020.
- Renewable electricity plan includes a commitment for 25 per cent of electricity to come from clean, renewable sources by 2015.

Weaknesses

- Failed to implement 2007 commitment to adopt California vehicle emissions standards by 2010.
- Aggressive move toward exploration and production of onshore natural gas, including shale gas and coalbed methane.
- Disproportionate amount of money spent on highway and road construction, compared to improving and promoting public transport.

Near-term opportunities

The Nova Scotia government should:

- Put a halt to issuing licences for exploration and development of onshore natural gas reserves until the province has assessed the full extent of the impacts on air and water quality, including greenhouse gas emissions; consulted Nova Scotians

- on whether and how to undertake these activities; and, if development is to proceed, develop a plan for addressing all impacts in a meaningful way.
- Develop a plan to reduce emissions from the transportation sector. Shifting budget resources from new highways into sustainable modes of transportation would be a good first step. Fulfilling the promise to match California's fuel-efficiency standards rather than relying on the weak federal proposal would also help.

NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR

Strengths

- Two new wind farms could reduce sulphur and carbon dioxide emissions by around 14 per cent.
- Office of Climate Change, Energy Efficiency and Emissions Trading established.
- Homeowner energy audits and retrofit grants available.

Weaknesses

- No targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from heavy industry.
- Flaring guidelines to address increased emissions from the oil and gas sector are voluntary.

Near-term opportunities

The Newfoundland and Labrador government should:

- Establish a strong carbon price (through a carbon tax or cap-and-trade system) to reduce emissions from heavy industry.
- Enact California fuel-efficiency standards for new-vehicle purchases.

YUKON

Strengths

- Commitment to 20 per cent increase in both energy efficiency and renewable energy by 2020.
- Working with the Northern Climate ExChange at Yukon College to develop adaptation strategies for Yukon and, in collaboration with the governments of Nunavut and Northwest Territories, to complete a Pan-Territorial Adaptation Strategy.

Weaknesses

- No territory-wide targets for reducing global warming emissions.
- Aggressively promoting oil and gas development, as well as mining activity.

Near-term opportunities

The Yukon government should:

- Either alone or in conjunction with the other territories introduce a carbon tax. (A pan-territorial carbon tax would level the playing field and send a clear message

that an area already experiencing climate change is not open for business as usual.)

- Implement as quickly as possible a territory-wide climate change adaptation strategy.

NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

Strengths

- Carbon tax being considered for updated 2011-2015 climate change strategy.
- Committed to spending \$15 million per year in support of alternative energy projects.

Weaknesses

- Accepts greenhouse gas emissions will double or triple in next few years.
- Current climate plan only addresses three per cent of GHG emissions (those from government).

Near-term opportunities

The Northwest Territories government should:

- Set emission-reduction targets for all major sources of emissions, including industry, and policies to reach them.
- Either alone or in conjunction with the other territories, introduce the proposed carbon tax. (A pan-territorial carbon tax would level the playing field and send a clear message that an area already experiencing climate change is not open for business as usual.)

NUNAVUT

Strengths

- Committed to developing alternative energy resource study to serve as basis of renewable energy plan.
- Homeowners can receive rebates of 50 per cent of cost of home repairs and appliance purchases to improve energy efficiency.

Weaknesses

- No targets or measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.
- No mention of reducing environmental impact of transportation.

Near-term opportunities

The Nunavut government should:

- Develop a new climate change action plan with goals, timelines and strategies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.