



Energizing the Climate Change Debate

**A Principled Framework for Canadian Energy Policies
Within a Carbon-Constrained World**

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Executive Summary

The wide-ranging Canadian policy debate on climate change will prompt a parallel and complementary national discussion of energy strategies, for climate change policies necessarily affect the production and consumption of energy. Given the importance of energy resources to the western Canadian economy, it is essential that western Canadians lead rather than follow this national energy discussion, that they help frame it in ways that reflect western Canadian experience, interests and aspirations.

This paper, we hope, provides a constructive catalyst for this national discussion by sketching in a principled framework for Canadian energy policies within a carbon-constrained world. The ten principles that we have identified are:

- Align energy policies with climate change policies;
- Focus energy policies on energy issues;
- Share the load;
- Get the policy scale right;
- Maximize the role of markets;
- Recognize the need for public investment;
- Acknowledge continental realities;
- Strengthen our competitive position in the global economy;
- Be realistic and practical;
- Be bold.

These principles lead us to conclude that a degree of policy coordination at the national level may indeed be necessary. If the above goals are to be achieved, then provincial, territorial, federal and municipal policies need to be integrated. After all, if Canada hopes to address the global challenge of climate change it is an effort that requires a coordinated response.

Setting the Stage

Although climate change is not a new public policy issue,¹ the recent popularity of Nobel Laureate Al Gore's film *An Inconvenient Truth*, international agreements such as the Kyoto Accord, initiatives such as California's low carbon fuel standard, and the ongoing debate about GHG emission reduction targets and how to meet them have helped make it one of the most pressing and complex public policy issues of the day. Governments around the world are exploring a broad array of policy responses to growing public concern, and Canadian governments are no exception as they engage in a policy discussion that is simultaneously local, provincial, national and international.

However, while all countries face risks associated with climate change, its impact will not play out evenly across countries or across regions within vast transcontinental countries such as Canada. The Prairies, for example, may face exposure to drought conditions that other Canadian regions will not face, whereas climate change in British Columbia could transform forests to a degree that other provinces will not encounter. Northern Canadians face thawing permafrost and wildlife effects that only lightly touch those living in the southern provinces. Thus while all countries confront climate change, the Canadian policy debate is greatly complicated by regional diversity that reflects, but also goes well beyond, differences in physical geography:

The industrial structure of the Canadian economy varies substantially across regional communities, and as a consequence neither climate change nor climate change policies will play out evenly across the loosely integrated national economy.

Canada's population and economic growth are unevenly distributed, and therefore the impact of climate change policies on both will also be unevenly distributed.

1. The Canada West Foundation released a report on the subject in 1994 entitled *The Climate for Debate: Global Warming and Policy Instruments for Emission Reduction*.

Because the effects of climate change vary across regions, we lack unifying national symbols around which popular support for a policy response might be built; there are no Canadian analogues to the melting glaciers in Switzerland or the pervasive impact of drought in Australia.

These regional differences make it difficult to articulate a truly *national* policy response to climate change. *The policy challenge is then multiplied many times when we layer on regional differences in the distribution and mix of energy resources.* Canada may well be an energy super power, and may aspire, in Prime Minister Stephen Harper's words, to be a *clean* energy super power, but our muscles are not evenly distributed across the national skeleton. The country's vast energy resources bunch up in ways that create dramatic differences in circumstances among the ten provinces and three territories, which also differ in the relative importance of energy exports and imports to their economies. Western Canada, which is particularly blessed in its energy endowment, reflects this diversity, providing a microcosm of the national scene. Saskatchewan, AB and BC have oil, BC, Alberta and Saskatchewan have abundant supplies of natural gas and coal; Manitoba and BC have extensive hydro developments and, in the former case, huge hydro potential; Saskatchewan has some of the world's largest uranium deposits; Alberta has the oil sands; and biofuels, solar, geothermal and wind power will become a significant part of the energy mix across the region.

But why are these differences both across and within regions so important? The answer is simple: *if climate change and global warming are the problem, the solution is to be found in how we produce and consume energy.* Thus as the policy discussion on climate change opens up a national discussion on energy policy, Canadians will face an extraordinarily complex policy challenge given the deep basket of regional differences described above, the significant dependency of the national and regional economies on energy exports (Canada is alone among the OECD countries in being a net energy exporter), and the fact that the ownership of natural resources rests with the provinces. If we begin to contemplate a truly *Canadian* discussion of energy policy, regional differences will matter, and indeed will matter more than they do in virtually any other policy domain.

If Canada's political history teaches us anything, it is that national policy initiatives that touch upon the provincial ownership of natural resources can be highly contentious. Regional fault lines run deep. Here we need only note the impact of the 1980 National Energy Program on the country's political landscape, the inability of the Council of the Federation to agree in August 2007 to even the rough outlines of a national climate change policy response, and the warnings of former Alberta Premier Peter Lougheed about the explosive potential of a constitutional battle over federal environmental legislation impinging upon Alberta's oil sands.² The political risks are particularly acute in the West, but they extend beyond the West to the rest of the federation. Both the West and the Canadian community within which it is embedded have an important stake in ensuring that the energy policy architecture for a carbon-constrained world does not exacerbate regional tensions.

It is essential, therefore, that the national discussion of potential Canadian energy strategies begins with western Canadians who have more at stake, more "skin in the game," than any other regional community, and who have more expertise and experience to bring to the table. If there was ever a need for an effective and articulate western voice in national policy development, it is now. This is no time for western Canadians to pull back, to react to proposals from outside the region; they should lead rather than follow the national discussion.

Ten Principles to Guide Canadian Energy Strategies

If the objective is to foster a constructive national policy discussion and to infuse that discussion with western Canadian interests and experience, how do we get off on the right foot? The approach taken here is to propose a broad set of principles to frame both public discussion and, with hope, the overarching public policy framework within which individual and corporate decisions are taken.³ This principled framework recognizes and complements the more detailed policy development process taking place across the country. (Note, for example, the tremendous amount of industry/provincial/federal work that is being done on carbon capture and storage.) However, it also recognizes that the *public* debate about energy policy requires a principled point of departure, a set of markers or signposts that can help people thread their way through a very complicated technical maze. In other words, and to shamelessly mix

2. In an August 14, 2007 Calgary address to the annual meeting of the Canadian Bar Association, Lougheed argued that pressure on the federal government for strong environmental legislation to reduce GHG emissions could threaten Canadian unity. Calgary Herald, "Alberta ground zero for green battle," August 15, 2007, A1.

3. A second component of the Foundation's *Getting It Right Project* featured four provincial roundtables held in April 2008 in Calgary, Regina, Vancouver and Winnipeg; the findings from the roundtables will be released in summer 2008.

metaphors, we need a set of principled pegs upon which a constructive public policy discussion can be hung. To this end, we suggest ten policy principles for consideration.

1. Align energy policies with climate change policies.

The crafting of energy policies in Canada will be driven by a host of considerations that go well beyond the need to reduce GHG emissions. For example, Canadians will expect energy policies to take into account the contribution of energy exports to our economic well-being, security of supply in an unstable world, economic competitiveness, urban design, and environmental impacts upon water. However, the *primary* driver will be the imperative to address climate change and global warming. Canadians will therefore expect energy policies to reduce GHG emissions by changing current methods of energy production, changing the energy mix, improving efficiencies and conservation, and reducing energy demand. The metric that Canadians and for that matter the international community will apply to energy policies will be their potential impact upon global warming and climate change. It makes sense, therefore, to begin our principled point of departure by stating the obvious but nonetheless essential need to align energy policies with climate change policy objectives.

2. Focus energy policies on energy issues.

If energy policies are to align with climate change policy objectives, then they should focus on the production and consumption of energy, including conservation policies designed to reduce demand and improve efficiency. There is a risk, however, that the discussion will expand to include policies related to the regional redistribution of wealth.⁴ Why, some Canadians might ask, do we not use this opportunity to redistribute some of the energy wealth that has been building up in the West? Could we, for example, craft a national policy response that would have Albertans bear the bulk of the cost, given the common belief that Albertans are not only responsible for a disproportionate share of Canada's GHG emissions but can afford the remediation?

This temptation to blend the policy architecture for Canada as a clean energy super power with a policy framework for the regional redistribution of wealth must be resisted. Energy policies designed to reshape how we produce and consume energy will be compromised if we impair behavioural adjustments in some parts of the country by shifting the costs to other parts of the country. We might, for example, and for example only, retain low fuel prices and thus current consumption patterns in Ontario by training our policy guns on the big emitters in the Alberta oil sands. Of even greater importance is the risk to the federation. Perceptions that a national energy strategy is redistributive in design or effect will produce stiff resistance in some regions despite a common desire to address climate change. Here Peter Lougheed's warning, noted above, and the legacy of the National Energy Program spring immediately to mind. Policy effectiveness demands attentiveness to the delicate balance of regional interests and aspirations. Energy policies that conflate or confuse climate change policies with the redistribution of wealth will be bad policy, and bad for the federation.

This is *not* to suggest, of course, that a national discussion of the regional redistribution of wealth is illegitimate. As ongoing discussions of the equalization program demonstrate, Canadians are fully capable of a thoughtful and constructive discussion of regional inequities in wealth and therefore the provision of public services. A problem emerges if we begin to conflate energy policy and redistributive policies. Should Canadians decide to change the way in which or the degree to which regional inequities in wealth are addressed, we have other policy tools at our disposal. When we come to the discussion of energy policies, it is essential to keep our eye on the climate change policy ball, and focus our policy initiatives where they will do the most good in meeting climate change objectives. Discussions about the potential regional redistribution of wealth should be left for another table, and another day.

4. We recognize that energy policy initiatives may well have differential impacts across income groups, and that such impacts must be taken into account in policy design. Our concern rests with income redistribution across rather than within regional economies

3. Share the load.

If national discussions about Canadian energy strategies are driven by common concerns that Canadians share about climate change and global warming, common concerns reflected in recent opinion polling, then Canadians at large, as both consumers and producers of energy, should be prepared to shoulder a proportionate share of the load. SUV drivers in New Brunswick and Alberta should face similar costs and contributions as should hydro users in Quebec and BC. Fairness, of course, suggests that any region's contribution to the solution should be proportionate to its contribution to the problem, but fairness also suggests sharing the load across sectors, not focusing on a single industry or source of emissions, and taking into account both production *and consumption* as sources of GHGs. This is really a call for "all hands to the pump" in the face of a global challenge; achieving our climate change goals will require sacrifices from both industry and consumers. If some segments of the population or the economy are let off the hook, it will be difficult to articulate and market a pan-Canadian policy approach.⁵

4. Get the policy scale right.

Simply put, the issue here is *who* should do *what*? Where public policies are needed to supplement or incent changes in individual and corporate behaviour, we must ask what policy options are best pursued by which order of government, for the right policy tool may have less than optimal results if applied within the wrong jurisdictional container. For example, should carbon markets, offsets and taxes, to name but a few of the policy options in play, be applied within provincial, regional, national or even international containers? Might a national carbon tax make more sense than an array of different provincial carbon taxes that might further fragment an already frail national economic union?

The old mantra, "think globally and act locally," is reflected in local action across the country, and virtually all provincial and territorial governments have energy policies in place.⁶ However, the mantra has to a degree been turned on its head by initiatives such as the Kyoto Accord and the Sydney Declaration that seek to drive policy action up to the international level. What is missing in Canada are regional and national policy frameworks that bridge local and provincial action to international agreements and objectives. This is the hole that could be filled by an over-arching strategic vision tailored to regional realities.

5. Maximize the role of markets.

It is tempting to believe that a regulatory approach will be sufficient to meet the challenge of climate change, to assume that if we prohibit or limit what firms and individuals can do, then success will be at hand. Over time, however, Canadians have come to rely more and more on markets to address energy supply issues, and markets unquestionably have a role to play in providing incentives for behavioural change. Markets can provide significant leverage on corporate and individual behaviour, behaviour that will have to change as we embrace a carbon-constrained world. It is important to note, however, that market leverage on behavioural change only works if there is full-cost accounting of energy production and consumption, and if the price signals are sufficient enough to motivate behavioural change. A belief in markets and the understandable desire to protect consumers from high energy costs are incompatible. It is essential, therefore, to maximize the role of markets while also recognizing the constructive and equally important role to be played by public policy. Markets alone will not take us where we need to go, but policy frameworks that do not harness the power of markets will also fail.

6. Recognize the need for public investment.

It is unlikely that the combination of regulation, voluntary action, and market-induced behavioural change will take us as far as we need to go, although all will be essential parts of the policy solution. At some point, or at some points, it is likely that successful energy

5. We recognize that tax measures designed to reduce energy consumption among low income Canadians may need to be offset in some way in order to ensure a rough measure of social equity.

6. See *Building On Our Strengths: An Inventory of Current Federal, Provincial and Municipal Climate Change Policies* available at www.cwf.ca.

strategies will also require extensive and perhaps even massive public investment. For example, if we want to create technological breakthroughs with respect to carbon capture and storage, if we want to reconfigure urban transportation systems or urban design, public investment will be required, particularly if we want to respond quickly to climate change imperatives. Urban forms, for example, will slowly evolve over time, but accelerating this evolution will take public investment. It would be a mistake to assume that we can meet climate change objectives on the cheap. If we accept the premise that a mix of production and consumption practices have shaped the existing environment we are working within, then it makes sense that a degree of taxpayer (or consumer) investment in remediation is needed.

If we agree that public investment will be an essential part of successful energy strategies, then two additional questions arise. The first is how best to assemble the necessary funds. For example, we might consider a dedicated carbon tax whose revenues would flow into clean energy investments rather than into general revenues. The second question relates to the distribution of such funds. Would that distribution be on a per capita basis, or would it be allocated to those sectors and parts of the country where the greatest traction could be obtained with respect to climate change objectives? And, would those funds be invested in the political jurisdictions from which they were raised? These questions in turn take us back to considerations of regional equity and the need to ensure that climate change policy objectives are not sacrificed to redistribute wealth.

7. Acknowledge continental realities.

Canadians are thoroughly embedded within a continental economy, and this fact applies with particular force to the energy sector. As noted above, Canada alone among the OECD countries is a net exporter of energy, and most of our exports flow south into American markets. Energy exports to the US, including hydro electricity from Quebec and natural gas from Saskatchewan, Alberta and British Columbia, make a huge contribution to the Canadian economy. Furthermore, Canadian energy policy is constrained to a degree by the North American Free Trade Agreement, and by the need to consider energy security within a continental environment. Finally, Canadian energy policies will inevitably be influenced by energy policies adopted by the American states and federal government; what Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger does in California or a new president does in Washington will ripple through the public policy landscape in Canada. None of this is to suggest that Canadian energy policies are captive to those adopted south of the border, that we have no scope for independent action, or that policy convergence is inevitable. However, policy design that fails to take our continental location into account will fail.

8. Strengthen our competitive position in the global economy.

The potential impacts of climate change are indeed troubling, and in this context some may argue that Governor Schwarzenegger has gone over the top in describing climate change as the next gold rush opportunity, or green rush opportunity, for his state. Quite appropriately, perhaps, Canadians see climate change in more dour, even alarmist terms. However, Schwarzenegger has also identified an important economic truth: efforts to address the effects of climate change and reduce human contributions to global warming will create huge economic opportunities. It is essential, therefore, that Canadian energy strategies identify such opportunities and, where possible, create international markets for Canadian technological innovation. A strategic response to climate change will recognize that new or improved forms of energy production can not only enhance productivity at home but also foster export opportunities. If we're smart, energy strategies could strengthen our competitive position in the global economy. Once again, an energy policy framework that is more national in scope could help channel provincial actions into a national orientation that could help make Canada a heavier player globally.

9. Be realistic and practical.

The world's energy future, and for that matter Canada's energy future, will undoubtedly feature a more diverse mix of energy sources than we see today; biofuels, and solar, wind, geothermal and tidal power may play larger roles, along with technological innovations yet to come. Ideally, Canadians will contribute to technological and policy leadership across this spectrum of energy futures. However, our foreseeable future will be dominated by more conventional energy sources—hydro, oil, natural gas, the oil sands, coal and nuclear. While there is no doubt that alternative sources of energy will be part of our future energy mix, it is also clear that they will not replace

existing energy sources in the short haul. Even in the long haul, they will be part of the mix, but not the entire mix. Significant changes to our energy mix will take time. Our primary policy focus should therefore be on reducing the carbon output of the current energy mix.

This leads to a second policy direction. If Canadians want their energy strategies to make a global contribution through technological innovation, it makes sense to concentrate on those energy sources that continue to underpin the national economy. Canada's climate precludes world leadership with respect to solar energy, and other countries are already much further down the road when it comes to wind power. Where we can make a difference, and a global contribution, comes through research and development on such fronts as carbon capture and storage, clean coal, biofuels, and improving the extraction of energy from the oil sands. If we can make progress on these fronts, then we can not only strengthen the national economy, but also make a significant contribution to the global challenges of climate change. Although we lack the demographic weight to have a global impact through changes in our domestic patterns of energy consumption, with only one global consumer in 200 living in Canada, we can have a global impact through changes in our patterns of energy production.

In short, energy strategies should play to our strengths. This does not preclude changes to the way in which we consume energy, it does not preclude energy conservation, and it does not preclude the possibility that technological breakthroughs on less conventional energy fronts will be made in Canadian laboratories. And, in this last respect, potential breakthroughs in BC with respect to fuel cells and tidal power provide but two examples. This would suggest that we not put all our public investment eggs in the conventional energy basket. Nonetheless, our comparative international advantage in research and development will be found in the country's conventional energy base. To use the old phrase, we have little choice but "to dance with the one that brung us."

Perhaps above all else, being realistic means adopting realistic timelines. Technological innovations need time to gain traction, although well-designed public policies can shorten this time to a degree. There is a tremendous amount of capital stock involved in the production and consumption of energy, and that stock is slow to turn over. Whether we are talking about large coal-fired plants for the production of energy, the cars we drive, the hot water heaters in our homes, or for that matter our homes themselves, we are talking about capital stock that will take years and in some cases generations to replace. It is important, therefore, to have energy policies that align with the turn-over of capital stock. And, as noted above, urban forms evolve slowly over time; providing effective public transit alternatives to those living in low density suburban neighbourhoods is neither easy nor cheap.

Given the importance of energy to the Canadian economy, it is more important to get the policy framework right than it is to rush to the head of the global pack. Canadian circumstances are unique in many ways, and our public policies should reflect that uniqueness.

10. Be bold.

Although the climate change debate is by no means new, there is no question that its intensity and scope have caught many Canadians by surprise. In many respects, our political system has been playing catch-up as parties and governments adjust to a rapidly changing international and domestic environment, and then adjust again.

Given this very fluid situation, there is a danger that we will be too cautious, too incremental in our policy response, that we will settle for a small home insulation program here, a small research initiative there. However, if we are not bold in our response, the spoils identified by Governor Schwarzenegger's "new gold rush" analogy will go to others. This does not mean, it should be stressed, that we take undue risks with our economic wellbeing, for here making haste would truly be making waste. Nonetheless, we can be bold on many technological fronts. For example, and for example only, a *well-funded* research and development initiative on carbon capture and storage could well lead to truly global contributions along with the attraction of research expertise to Canada.

Being bold means seizing the opportunity for leadership, not across the board but in areas of existing strength and potential contribution. To an unfortunate degree, our international reputation to this point has been that of a country that talks the talk but fails to walk the walk (and to be fair, in some cases not even talk the talk). We can do better, and we can find the balance between being bold and being realistic, the yin and yang of an effective energy strategy.

Conclusions

There is no question that realigning current patterns of energy production and consumption with fluid GHG and climate change objectives will be an extraordinarily difficult political, policy and social challenge. We do not want to suggest that there are simple solutions or silver bullets. The principles suggested in this discussion paper should therefore be seen as nothing more than an attempt to frame the public policy debate, and to do so within the public arena. To this end, this discussion paper proposes the following principled point of departure for Canadian energy strategies:

1. *Align energy policies with climate change policies.*
2. *Focus energy policies on energy issues.*
3. *Share the load.*
4. *Get the policy scale right.*
5. *Maximize the role of markets.*
6. *Recognize the need for public investment.*
7. *Acknowledge continental realities.*
8. *Strengthen our competitive position in the global economy.*
9. *Be realistic and practical.*
10. *Be bold.*

These ten principles lead us to a final point, and that is the need for policy coordination. A particularly acute need, if not today then in the near future, is to achieve a reasonable measure of policy integration across the country's fourteen provincial, territorial and federal jurisdictions. If we are indeed tackling a global threat, then it makes sense to think about a *Canadian* energy policy rather than a response fragmented across jurisdictions.

Now there is no question that a call for a Canadian approach will trigger alarm bells among those with memories of past initiatives. We want to be clear, therefore, that when we call for a Canadian or national policy framework we are calling for the integration of federal, provincial, territorial and even urban policy initiatives, all nested within continental realities and international agreements. We do not equate *Canadian* or *national* with the Government of Canada, although we also recognize that the Government of Canada must play a role in the articulation of a Canadian or national energy strategy. If Ottawa sits on its hands, we will not achieve an adequate degree of policy integration.

In essence, we are calling for a thoughtful discussion of *who* should do *what*, a discussion to make sure that the right policies are being pursued by the right governments. It is important to think through a policy architecture that will be effective while at the same time avoiding any further fragmentation of the economic union. At the same time, we do not want to discourage provincial policy experimentation and leadership; to wait for Ottawa to lead this policy file could be a very long wait indeed.

As we move forward, it is essential to recognize and respect regional differences in the endowment, production and consumption of energy resources. Furthermore, some provinces, such as BC, face greater public demand for policies that promote energy conservation and carbon reduction, and therefore enjoy a popular willingness to make sacrifices in support of these goals. Other provinces, such as Saskatchewan and Alberta, face growth pressures that challenge strategies designed to lower energy consumption. These are facts of Canadian life, facts that must be taken into account in any discussion of what a pan-Canadian energy strategy might look like. Given these differences, it is hardly surprising that Canada's provinces and territories have charted their own courses to address climate change. Does this preclude national action? No. Because the overall goalposts are roughly the same—reducing GHG emissions and promoting energy conservation—it makes sense to consider ways in which some degree of policy coordination across regions and jurisdictions may be possible, keeping in mind that the current landscape suggests that a “one-size-fits-all” national garment will not be effective.

The design of a Canadian energy strategy will be a long and difficult task. But, to use the old saying, a journey of 1,000 miles begins with one step. In this case, however, we suggest two steps. The first step is to establish a principled point of departure, a set of broad policy guidelines within which the detailed policy work can take place and through which the Canadian public can

begin to come to grips with the policy complexities. The second step is to assert western Canadian leadership, to begin the national debate in the West where policy outcomes will have the most direct and immediate effects, and where the pool of energy experience and expertise is the deepest.

This opportunity for national policy leadership from the West is too important to pass up. The region's resource-based and export-based economy brings into focus the critically important relationship between climate change and energy policies. Western Canadians, moreover, have not only the relevant policy expertise and front-line energy experience, but also a compelling self-interest in ensuring that policies promote rather than impair sustainable economic prosperity in western Canada. In short, there is no better place to frame a constructive national debate.

Western Canadians, of course, do not have a natural right to determine a Canadian energy strategy, nor do they have the demographic or political weight to impose one. However, we can lead through the power of our ideas. To sit on our hands, to sit on our minds, would not only be risky; it would also be an abdication of our responsibility to the rest of the country, and to generations to come. ■

About the Canada West Foundation

Our Vision

A dynamic and prosperous West in a strong Canada.

Our Mission

A leading source of strategic insight, conducting and communicating non-partisan economic and public policy research of importance to the four western provinces and all Canadians.

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In 1970, the One Prairie Province Conference was held in Lethbridge, Alberta. Sponsored by the University of Lethbridge and the Lethbridge Herald, the conference received considerable attention from concerned citizens and community leaders. The consensus at the time was that research on the West (including BC and the Canadian North) should be expanded by a new organization. To fill this need, the Canada West Foundation was created under letters patent on December 31, 1970. Since that time, the Canada West Foundation has established itself as one of Canada's premier research institutes. Non-partisan, accessible research and active citizen engagement are hallmarks of the Foundation's past, present and future endeavours. These efforts are rooted in the belief that a strong West makes for a strong Canada.

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