

November 26, 2019

The Honourable Jonathan Wilkinson, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Environment and Climate Change
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0A6



Dear Minister:

Re: Climate action and just transition must be top priorities of this government

Congratulations on being named Canada's Minister of Environment and Climate Change!

I am writing to you on behalf of the National Union of Public and General Employees' (NUPGE) 390,000 members to urge you to ensure bold climate action and a just transition are priorities in your ministerial term.

As you well know, climate change emerged as one of the top issues in the 2019 federal election. Voters signaled their support for government action, with two-thirds casting their votes for parties whose platforms contained climate policy commitments. Numerous polls have also confirmed that a strong majority of Canadians are concerned about climate change and supportive of climate action, including an energy transition, towards a sustainable future.

With this mandate, and the scientific consensus that we must act immediately and radically to mitigate climate change and adapt to its effects, we urge you to build upon the Trudeau government's initial steps to take bold climate action and to ensure that the transition to a low-carbon economy is fair and just for all people in Canada, including workers.

The National Union represents 390,000 workers across the country, many of whom work in their provincial public sector. Our members are experiencing the already-prevalent effects of climate change, both in the work they do and as community members.

Our members know first-hand the effects of climate change as workers on the front lines providing health care to those affected by extreme weather and climate-related disasters, fighting the increasingly frequent and severe wildfires, and providing social services to those vulnerable communities affected disproportionately by climate change, to name just a few.

If we don't take action to tackle the climate crisis, our members are likely to face further pressures as Canadians become sicker, hungrier, displaced from their homes, and more economically insecure. Our members are also worried about climate change—as members of communities across Canada and as citizens mindful of ensuring they leave behind a sustainable environment for future generations.

We stand in solidarity, too, with other workers affected by the climate crisis, including those in the resource sectors. Along with our allies, the National Union has long been part of the call for a *just transition*. It is an approach to decarbonization that does not cast aside the workers in

affected industries, but instead involves them and their labour representatives in decision-making and policy-making processes to ensure the transition is fair and equitable for workers and their communities.

To foster a just transition, the Canadian government will need to invest resources in retraining, social security and income supports, workforce development, and community supports. This will require support from robust and well-funded public and social services. We urge you to enact federal legislation that will support the development of green energy in Canada, delivered through the public sector.

A just transition strategy must work to address existing inequities in order to avoid repeating or re-entrenching them. The effects of climate change and environmental degradation are uneven, with the poor, women, migrants, and racialized and Indigenous communities bearing the brunt. Climate action, including a just transition, must include marginalized workers and communities and promote more equitable outcomes.

In developing these policies and programs, Indigenous communities and leaders must be at the table. Indigenous rights and sovereignty, particularly as they pertain to natural resources, must be respected.

While it is crucial to recognize and guard against the potential negative outcomes of this transition process, it is also true that a *just* transition will provide many opportunities for the Canadian economy and our communities, such as the work that will be required in renewable energy, green infrastructure, and retrofitting. Furthermore, system change provides an opportunity to address existing inequities and to build a more equal and just society.

The Trudeau government has already signaled a commitment to this process through the creation of the Task Force on Just Transition for Canadian Coal Power Workers and Communities. We urge you to continue this important and increasingly pressing work, and to significantly expand upon it, during your term as Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

Given the clear mandate from Canadians and dire warnings from scientists, it is imperative that your government undertake bold and transformational action on climate change. The security and prosperity of Canada, and a sustainable future for the generations to come, depend on it.

Thank you for taking the time to hear our concerns. We look forward to future opportunities for engagement.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'LB', written over a light blue horizontal line.

Larry Brown
President

cc: Bert Blundon, Secretary-Treasurer
National Executive Board