

February 1, 2022

The Hon. Steven Guilbeault, PC, MP  
Minister of Environment and Climate Change  
House of Commons  
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A6

*Via Email*



Dear Minister:

I am writing to you on behalf of the 400,000 members of the National Union of Public and General Employees (NUPGE). First, congratulations on your appointment to Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

As I wrote to your predecessor Minister Wilkinson, we need bold action to tackle the climate crisis and there is no time to lose. I am writing to you today to emphasize the essential role the public sector has in this.

NUPGE's members live in communities across the country where they are seeing firsthand the effects of the climate crisis. As with the COVID-19 crisis, the climate crisis does not impact everyone equally as BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and people of colour), people with disabilities, women, youth, seniors, migrants, and people living in poverty or with low incomes disproportionately face negative impacts.

NUPGE members also experience the impacts of climate change in their jobs. Our members include wildland firefighters facing longer and more severe seasons. Health care professionals caring for those affected by pollution and extreme weather, and social service workers providing care and support to vulnerable populations. NUPGE members are also provincial government workers keeping the public informed during disasters, carrying out various support programs for people, and implementing environmental protections.

These and other public services play a key role in responding to the effects of the climate crisis, which are projected to get worse. Therefore, investing in expanding high-quality public services will be a key part of climate change adaptation. This requires investing in the workers who deliver these critical services, including ensuring fair wages and working conditions as well as the resources they need to do their jobs.

Of course, mitigation is a crucial part of climate action. The necessary transition away from a fossil fuel-based economy is a big undertaking and the public sector has an essential role to play. I urge the federal government, working with its provincial and territorial counterparts, to invest in renewable energy, sustainable infrastructure, and green transportation delivered through a strong public sector.

In 2021, NUPGE joined labour organizations from around the world in endorsing the [Trade Union Program for a Public, Low-Carbon Energy Future](#). Neoliberal climate and energy policies tied to privatization and commodification have failed to stop the rise of greenhouse



gas emissions. The Trade Union Program emphasizes the importance of public energy systems to ensure the energy transition is socially just, economically viable, and effective in reaching climate goals.

This is true in other areas of green infrastructure, such as public transit. It is widely recognized that improving public transport so that people have realistic alternatives to driving is essential if we are going to reduce emissions causing climate change. But decades of under-investment means that public transit systems in Canadian cities are decades behind where they need to be, and transit service in smaller communities is limited to non-existent. If that is going to change, the federal government has to be willing to fund a significantly greater share of transit infrastructure and operating costs.

It is important that the infrastructure and services needed to reduce emissions causing climate change be publicly procured, owned, maintained, and operated. In the long-term, public delivery of services and infrastructure is the best use of public funds. The greater accountability that comes with public delivery makes it easier to fix problems and public delivery means organizations develop in-house expertise, reducing the likelihood of problems being repeated.

It is important that workers and their unions across these sectors be involved in the decision-making process. I was pleased to see your mandate letter included working with the Minister of Natural Resources and the Minister of Labour to advance Just Transition legislation. NUPGE has long supported the call for a Just Transition. Workers, communities, and their representatives must be involved. Not just in a one-time consultation, but in every stage of the transition. NUPGE's full recommendations can be found in our written submission to the federal consultation on Just Transition.

Climate action and Just Transition through a strong public sector is possible. By following through on the commitment to eliminate fossil fuel subsidies and by implementing fair taxation, the federal government can absolutely afford to carry out an ambitious vision that tackles the crisis head-on and leaves no one behind.

Bert Blundon, Secretary-Treasurer, was pleased to meet with you at COP26 on behalf of NUPGE members. We hope that this was the opening of dialogue with you and your team. I would like to request a meeting with Bert and myself to further discuss the needs and priorities of our members.

I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Larry Brown  
President

cc: The Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson, Minister of Natural Resources  
The Hon. Seamus O'Regan, Minister of Labour  
Bert Blundon, NUPGE Secretary-Treasurer  
National Executive Board