

April 16, 2021

The Honourable Jonathan Wilkinson, PC, MP
Minister of Environment and Climate Change
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6

Sent via email

Dear Minister:

I am writing to you on behalf of the National Union of Public and General Employees (NUPGE) regarding the need for urgent action on climate change.

NUPGE's more than 390,000 members across Canada are already experiencing the impacts of climate change. NUPGE members are the health care professionals providing care to those affected by pollution and extreme weather. They are the social service workers providing care and support to vulnerable people, who are disproportionately affected by climate change. NUPGE members are also the wildland firefighters facing longer and more severe seasons. In addition, they are the government workers responsible for implementing environmental protections, ensuring the public receive notices of flood evacuations or climate-related disasters, and carrying out various support programs for residents. The examples go on.

We need immediate action to prevent scientists' worst-case scenario predictions for the climate crisis, to adapt to the impacts that are already here, and to ensure that workers and communities have the necessary protections and resources to realize their rights and so that nobody is left behind.

It has been encouraging to see your government's statements and commitments on this front. But now is the time for ambitious and concrete action. To put it simply, we cannot afford to delay any longer on a just and equitable transition towards a sustainable economy.

As I wrote to you on November 25, 2020, NUPGE welcomed your government's commitment to legislate the target of net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. Bill C-12, the Canadian Net-Zero Emissions Accountability Act, is a step in the right direction, but I urged your government to go further. In particular, the proposed legislation is lacking the level of ambition and the enforcement mechanisms required.

Still, it has been disappointing to see the proposed legislation be put on the back burner since November. I urge your government to put climate accountability back on the agenda, so that it can be properly debated, strengthened, and then put to use.



It is also crucial that your government take every action possible to ensure that the transition towards a more sustainable economy does not leave anybody behind. As I have previously written to you, in the November 25 letter, and in one sent a year earlier in November 2019, NUPGE believes that the approach to decarbonization must involve affected workers, including their labour representatives, and communities in decision-making and policymaking processes to ensure the transition is fair and equitable. This includes energy and resources workers and those in the communities where these industries are located, such as workers in health care, social services, hospitality, and food services.

As I have previously written, a Just Transition will require planning and investments in retraining, workforce development, income support and a strong social safety net, and community supports. This will require a robust and well-funded public service. NUPGE has also called for federal legislation to support the development of green energy in Canada, delivered through the public sector, and to build on the work of the Task Force on Just Transition for Canadian Coal Power Workers and Communities.

A recent [report by economist Jim Stanford](#) found that a managed transition away from fossil fuels, if done through long-term planning and with supports for retirement, redeployment, and regional diversification, can happen without any involuntary layoffs.

NUPGE welcomed your government's earlier commitment to develop a Just Transition Act, which could provide the tools to carry out such a managed transition. Again, we are disappointed by what appears to be a lack of progress on developing and implementing a Just Transition Act.

Researchers at the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives have recently outlined a [roadmap for developing such legislation](#). It shows that there are numerous lessons to be learned from both the Canadian context and international best practices. In doing so, the report identifies concrete steps that could be taken to both minimize the harms of the transition and maximize the benefits for workers and communities.

I urge your government to make good on the commitment to a Just Transition Act. The transition is already underway, and so the federal government must step in with the types of programs and supports described above, and those recommendations put forward by experts and worker advocates, to be sure that transition is a just one.

In the same vein, I have also written to you previously about the need to address the unique and disproportionate impacts of environmental issues and of climate change on people living in poverty, on communities of Black and Indigenous people, and of people of colour, on women, and on people with disabilities. As is the case with Just Transition legislation and policies, these groups must be at the decision-making tables and be empowered to lead the way on finding solutions.

In the upcoming federal budget, we expect to see follow-through on these commitments to equity, justice, and sustainability that your government has claimed to champion. This moment presents an enormous opportunity—and a responsibility—to invest in climate action and climate justice as being core to the recovery from the pandemic and beyond.

The pandemic has demonstrated how it is possible for governments to mobilize resources and investments to address a crisis. We also know that sizable investments in climate action, climate justice, and a Just Transition are absolutely within reach if Canada implements truly fair taxation.

It bears repeating that, on each of these intersecting fronts, we cannot afford to delay action any longer.

I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'LB' or similar initials, written in a cursive style.

Larry Brown
President

cc: Bert Blundon, Secretary-Treasurer
National Executive Board
Advisory Committee on the Environment