

Climate change and the Environment

A losing performance

Stephen Harper's woeful environmental record will not improve with his new budget. Canada continues to slide down the standings when it comes to climate change and the environment. Consider these recent results:

- The 2010 Climate Change Performance Indexⁱ compiled by Germanwatch, a political think tank, ranks Canada in 59th place out of 60 countries.
- The 2010 Yale University Environmental Performance Indexⁱⁱ ranks Canada 46th out of 163 countries worldwide and behind the vast majority of developed nations.
- Canada is ranked 10th out of thirteen G20 countries surveyed on the percentage of their economic stimulus dedicated to green spending.

Had Canada scored this poorly at the recent Winter Olympic Games the entire country would have been disappointed, outraged and ashamed. Now Harper's thin budget will further weaken Canada's environmental record, which has been in steady decline since Harper took office.

What's in the budget?

- \$8 million per year to protect the Great Lakes.
- \$300 million for Atomic Energy of Canada Limited to support its operations.

- \$100 million over four years for the Next Generation Renewable Power Initiative to support clean technologies in forestry.
- \$9.2 million and \$2.2 to Environment Canada and Fisheries and Oceans Canada respectively to sustain Arctic meteorological and navigational services.
- \$18.4 million in ongoing funding to sustain environmental reporting indicators on greenhouse gases, water and air quality.
- Unclear green jobs schemes.
- A shift in responsibility for environmental assessments for energy projects from the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency to the National Energy Board.

What does it mean?

It means Harper still doesn't get it. His "stay the course" approach is out of touch with present environmental and economic realities. Harper clings to old, tried-but-failed ideas that are incongruous with 21st century needs. Specifically, he refuses to embrace the new green economy based on truly clean energy sources. Instead Harper props up dirty sources of energy production, opting only to rebrand them rather than reject them. Similarly, energy projects will not be fettered by environmental assessments from outside agencies. This means it'll be full steam ahead with oil and gas development and the ensuing environmental damage they cause. And

Harper continues to push carbon capture and storage as a viable climate change solution, a strategy that again allows dirty energy development to expand. Re-announced funding is granted to monitor the damage done to the environment – but not to prevent that harm.

It also means that Canada is out of step with the United States. So often we hear from Harper that we must align ourselves with the Americans. The Americans are outscoring us on climate change and the environment. For example, the U.S government is making major new investments in green power, outspending Canada by a factor of 14:1 per capita on renewables like wind and solar in 2009. No need for overtime – we're too far behind with Harper leading our team.

What would be better choices?

- A nation-wide price on greenhouse gas emissions. Harper's government has yet to put together a meaningful climate change plan. Any credible plan would include a price on greenhouse gas emissions. Canada's greenhouse gas emissions are still steeply rising and only aggressive measures will help at this point.
- Funding climate change mitigation both domestically and internationally. Harper's government continues to be among the worst in the world on climate change. Solutions to climate change – both domestic and international – should be funded.
- Creating real green jobs and climate jobs. To be a leader in innovation and tech in the 21st century means

creating clean energy jobs that cut greenhouse gas emissions. Hundreds of thousands of jobs have been lost that aren't coming back and unemployment is still high. People could be back to work if Harper had a consequential green jobs strategy.

- Investing deeply in truly renewable sources of energy. Canada continues to lag behind the rest of the developed world, as well as many developing countries on this file. Harper's new budget does not situate Canada to stimulate job growth and compete in new green economy of the 21st century.
- Financing a just transition program for workers displaced by economic transformation linked to environmental issues.

Federal budgets are a chance to create lasting economic and environmental benefits for Canadians. Harper's budget does not do this. Worse, it ignores current realities and trajectories. While the rest of the world's leading economies pursue clean energy solutions and mitigate climate change without weakening their economies, Harper does what Harper does best – he underwhelms and under delivers by grasping desperately and stubbornly to old-school ideas. We should *not* be staying the course. That course is heating the planet and destroying the world's ecosystems. We should instead be aggressively blazing a path to a low-carbon future abounding with good green jobs.

For more information, visit <http://cupe.ca/budget>

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March 5, 2010

ⁱ <http://www.germanwatch.org/klima/ccpi2010.pdf>

ⁱⁱ <http://epi.yale.edu/Countries>