

Government of Alberta : Lecture on Alberta's Climate Leadership Plan

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Premier Rachel Notley, Alberta

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It's great to be here at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies to talk about Alberta and how we are taking action on climate change.

If you are engaged in climate and energy policy, then I'm sure you've heard a lot about our province, especially the oil sands.

And, quite frankly, its possible some of it might not have been very positive.

But I am proud to say that over the course of the last year, since my government has been in office, Alberta's environmental reputation has started to change. And, I believe, change for the better. A change we are earning.

We've taken action on climate change, not only because it is crucial to the future of our energy economy...

...but because it is the right thing to do.

Today I'm going to tell you how we're doing it.

To start, it's important to understand how essential oil and gas is to Alberta's economy.

One in six Albertans is directly or indirectly employed by our energy industry.

So the success of that industry is extremely important to our province, and to the success of Canada's economy.

There is also something else that is equally important to understand about the people of Alberta.

We care deeply about the environment.

Anyone who has visited Alberta, or even seen pictures of Banff or Jasper, can understand why.

We live in one of the most naturally beautiful places in the world.

In addition to working in the energy industry, we are campers, hunters, hikers, skiers and explorers, farmers.

And we are global citizens.

We understand the impacts of carbon emissions, not only on our environment, but on the world - a world that is standing up to climate change.

That has had an impact on us too.

Countries and citizens around the world are concerned about high carbon energy.

And Alberta's oil sands have, quite frankly, served as an effective symbol to mobilize around this issue.

Alberta's past governments did not do much to address the criticism our energy sector attracted.

In the result we paid a heavy price - both environmentally and economically.

So last year, Albertans took action.

They elected a new government - my government.

We ran in part on a promise to take action on climate change and, within 6 months of taking office, that's what we did.

At COP 21 in Paris, we presented Alberta's Climate Leadership Plan to the world...

...establishing our province as one of the most environmentally-responsible energy producing jurisdictions on the planet.

As a result, if you've heard people talking about Alberta lately, I'm hopeful it's in a whole new context. On the issue of climate change, a 'whole new context' is exactly what the world needs.

Acknowledgements

That's why I'm so honoured to speak with you today.

I know there are many students here today, and I always appreciate the opportunity to speak with young people.

Because, while climate change is already affecting us...

...the most intense effects of climate change will be experienced in the years and decades to come by you, the young people of today, and by your children and grandchildren.

More than anyone, you have a stake in this fight.

And that's why I am looking forward to hearing your questions and ideas in a few minutes.

Before I get into the details of Alberta's new climate policies, I would like to thank Dr. Christopher Sands and Bob Perciasepe for hosting us, and everyone who has taken the time to join us today.

Thank you for this opportunity to showcase Alberta's commitment to environmental stewardship.

Climate Leadership

So let me begin by talking about the perspective from which we began our work on this project. Many people have accepted the myth that energy producers cannot be environmental leaders, and that the economy must be in conflict with the environment.

We began our work with the assumption this is not correct.

And I think we've proved that we're right.

Climate Leadership Plan

Here's what we've done.

The backbone of our policy framework is a price on carbon.

Our carbon levy, which will rise to 30 dollars per tonne economy-wide in January of 2018, will provide an incentive for everyone, industry and individuals alike, to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions.

A carbon price is widely acknowledged by experts, from the World Bank to the OECD, to be one of the most effective ways to reduce emissions.

Every penny of this revenue from the carbon levy will be invested directly into Alberta's economy.

We will rebate lower and middle-income Albertans, to help them with the transition.

The balance of the levy will be invested in measures to further reduce our province's emissions...

...including renewables, research and technology, green infrastructure like public transit, and energy efficiency programs.

Prior to our election, Alberta was the only province in Canada without an energy efficiency program. We are going to remedy that. A portion of the levy will be invested in a new energy efficiency office, and that office will be driving significant investments to help Albertans use energy more efficiently, and to reduce emissions from our homes and businesses.

We will also be making significant investments in technology, which will be crucial to the future of lower-carbon energy - not only in Alberta, but around the world.

Investment in green technologies will create new jobs and help build our knowledge economy.

As a result, Alberta's next big energy export might not be carried through pipelines.

It could be a technology that helps the world to reduce carbon emissions from energy production.

So, taken overall, the carbon price today will help ensure that there will be fewer emissions tomorrow.

Another key component of our plan places a limit on oil sands emissions, at 100 megatonnes annually. This is a very significant measure. A few short years ago, our predecessors were contemplating a development plan that would have increased emissions from the oil sands to 300 megatonnes a year. That

was the core of the concern that caused Alberta to be vilified around the world. Our legislated emissions cap - one third the previously planned emissions -- ensures a much more moderate and manageable emissions footprint.

And since this is an emissions limit and not a production limit per se, this emissions limit will encourage current and future projects to be more innovative - and specifically, to develop production methods that emit less carbon.

Our policy will allow the oil sands sector to produce the energy that helps fuel Canada's economy, while being more environmentally conscious and reducing per barrel emissions.

The next part of our Climate Leadership Plan is the commitment to phase out coal-fired electricity emissions by 2030.

Alberta currently burns more coal than the rest of Canada put together. We depend on coal-fired plants for almost half of our electricity.

We now have a plan to get entirely off coal - a 100% phase-out of coal emissions - by 2030.

This move will reduce the negative health impacts of coal emissions on the health of our citizens.

Currently, coal-fired electricity emissions cost Alberta millions of health care dollars every year.

More importantly, they cost lives.

And once you take the very real human costs into account, the supposedly low-cost energy produced by coal isn't so affordable after all.

Under our plan, two-thirds of coal-generated power will be replaced by renewable energy, like wind and solar.

And by 2030, renewable energy will account for up to 30 per cent of our province's electricity overall.

Investments from our carbon levy will help to fund this transition, as we build a greener, cleaner electricity system.

Alberta's abundant, clean-burning natural gas supply will help with the balance of baseload electricity production, further reducing our emissions.

Finally, our plan includes a methane strategy, which will result in a reduction of methane emissions by 45 per cent from 2014 levels by 2025.

Methane is a very potent greenhouse gas, many times more potent than carbon dioxide...

...and methane emission reduction is an extremely cost-effective way to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

The technology to capture methane emissions already exists, and is being implemented by industry across our province.

We were extremely pleased to see Alberta's methane policy mirrored in the recent U.S.-Canada Joint Statement on Climate, Energy, and Arctic Leadership...

...which was signed when President Obama hosted Prime Minister Trudeau at a State Dinner here in Washington earlier this spring.

Our province is proud to be leading the way in innovative and effective climate change solutions...

...and we hope to see more aspects of our plan adopted across Canada and across the continent in the months and years to come.

US-Canada Cooperation

Which brings me to the topic of cooperation between the United States and Canada.

Alberta's Climate Leadership Plan presents many opportunities for our two nations to work together, in service of both our environmental and economic goals.

We have been listening closely to recent calls for a North American framework on climate change and energy policy.

Prime Minister Trudeau proposes such an approach.

Now, we come to that discussion with a strong bias to keep the capital generated from climate change policies in the jurisdiction it was raised in.

But with that understood, a widely-adopted framework and widely-adopted floors under these policies would work extremely well for Alberta.

So our Government will support such a framework, and we stand ready to be at the table with solutions.

Just look at the record so far. We are already off to a strong start on methane policy. We can do the same for the rest of the climate change agenda.

National Leadership

With our Climate Leadership Plan, we've shown that the right environmental policies can gain support from industry, environmental groups and leaders across Canada and around the world...

...while at the same time encouraging significant emissions reductions.

Alberta's effort on climate change is changing the conversation on Alberta and the oil sands.

We are re-gaining our position as a leader in a global community that is taking action on climate change.

Our province is working closely with Prime Minister Trudeau as Canada develops a national climate change framework.

In early March, I met with the Prime Minister and all Canadian Premiers to discuss our nation's environmental future.

Together, we unanimously signed on to the Vancouver Declaration, committing us to reducing greenhouse gas emissions in line with the COP 21 Paris Agreement.

We have also committed to promoting clean economic growth to create jobs, and to working together to mitigate the impact of a changing climate.

As with the methane plan agreed to by Prime Minister Trudeau and President Obama, we are working to ensure this federal agreement mirrors the progress we are seeking to make with our plan.

As just one example, we are working as co-chairs, alongside the federal government, on a Working Group on Mitigation Opportunities.

Our focus is how best to achieve clean growth and achieve a range of ambitious reductions in key sectors.

This process will be complemented by a broad engagement with Canada's Indigenous peoples.

Leadership on climate change is a role we are proud to take on.

Before our Climate Leadership Plan, many thought that Alberta would never be an environmental leader...

...or that it was possible to develop good, effective environmental that in the long term would actually benefit the energy industry.

I am here to tell you, it can be done.

For the sake of future generations, Canada, and nations around the world, must transition to lower-carbon economies.

But the fact is, this transition - from investments in energy efficiency to public transit to new technologies - will cost a lot of money.

And a thriving energy industry can help to fund that transition.

That's why we have taken a national leadership role...

...and have created real, substantial, realistic and effective policy.

Policy that will not only reduce emissions, but that will allow the energy industry to participate in - and contribute to - a lower-carbon energy future.

Conclusion

Friends, Albertans are proud of our energy industry, and the role our province plays in our national economy.

Albertans are also proud that we are now developing that industry as climate change leaders.

But action on climate change isn't about one province or even one country.

It's about the future of our planet.

And now is the time to work together and find solutions to the challenges we all face.

Action on climate change is one of the most important things that we can do to secure a healthy and prosperous future.

And I look forward to Alberta's leadership role in a lower-carbon global energy future.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak with you today.

I always appreciate the opportunity to talk about Alberta's renewed environmental record.

It is one of my government's proudest achievements, and something that will be a legacy for generations to come.

Thank you. I'm looking forward to your questions.

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