Open letter to all Provincial and Territorial Premiers,

This week you will be attending the Premiers’ Summit on Climate Change in Québec. The summit is an opportunity to chart a new course for our common future. Scientific data says that we must bend the greenhouse gas curve downwards in order to avoid dangerous climate change. In March, Switzerland committed to reduce its emissions by 50% for 2030 while Norway and the European Union committed to a 40% reduction. The fossil fuel era is ending. April 14th 2015 can mark the beginning of Canada’s transition towards a low-carbon society.

We represent the Sustainable Canada Dialogues, an initiative of scholars from all 10 provinces. Our recent position paper Acting on Climate Change: Solutions from Canadian Scholars proposes a “made in Canada” climate action plan.

There is no silver bullet to address climate change. Instead climate change policy needs to trigger a long term transition allowing Canadians to plan for the future while recognizing that goals take time to accomplish. The transition towards a low-carbon society will permit governments, businesses and citizens to prepare for the expected changes and take action. It will allow citizens to make choices about what is acceptable and desirable in the low-carbon futures we need to build together.

As with past transitions, there will be controversies and setbacks. Some economic sectors will contract - as others expand. No one knows in advance which technologies or institutional solutions will ultimately prove most effective, cost-efficient, and environmentally as well as socially positive. We do not know what the world will look like in thirty or fifty years’ time. However, nations around the globe are engaging with the challenge of defining low-carbon development trajectories.

We are alone in North America. Both Mexico and the U.S.A. have risen to the challenge but Canada has yet to submit its new emissions reduction commitment. Premiers, please ask the Federal Government to contribute positively to the UN process and upcoming Paris Climate Conference in December. Adopting clear and ambitious policy orientations, such as those that we put forward, ushers in great opportunities for innovation by developing new technologies, businesses, and employment.
Accordingly, on April 14th we urge you to agree on two fundamental steps to begin this transition. First, put the same price on carbon across all provinces and territories. Canadian business needs a national carbon price in order to invest in the capital equipment, research and development necessary for future prosperity.

Second, begin to unleash Canada’s vast renewable energy potential by strengthening interprovincial cooperation for production and distribution of low carbon electricity, and by working with cities and regions in every province to develop local energy sources, green jobs, and more resilient communities. Deploying renewable energy technologies and systems will open new markets and trigger significant positive change in the economics of energy in Canada.

The Paris Climate Conference will feature sub-national governments in a prominent way. Your decision to join the international efforts to address climate change will allow Canadians to enter the playing field and become front-runners in the global transition to strong, low carbon economies.

Since our position paper Acting on Climate: Solutions by Canadian scholars was launched on March 18th, we have received messages from all over Canada. The solutions we presented are giving hope in a situation that seemed insurmountable. We sense that many Canadians are concerned about climate change – but don’t know what can be done about it.

As Premiers you have a critical opportunity to demonstrate compelling leadership taking actions to create a sustainable future for each of the provinces and territories. The most important aspect of this transition to a low-carbon society is to start now. The time is ripe. Please, act now.

Yours truly,

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