Springing Canada Forward:
Open Letter to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau
on Climate-Literate Stimulus Priorities

Dear Prime Minister Trudeau,

The Globe and Mail reported your government's desire for shovel-ready projects for the post-COVID stimulus package. As 50 scholars from Sustainable Canada Dialogues, we propose a few key principles to guide investments that can future-proof our economies against climate catastrophe. Investments should link job creation and green infrastructure. They should include funding for both initial capital and long-term operations. COVID-19 has acutely highlighted that social inequalities threaten Canada's resilience. Thus, investments should include principles of equity, diversity and inclusion and be consistent with Indigenous rights. Finally, to support an evidence-based approach, pilot projects, experimentation, rigorous testing and evaluation should be built into all major post-COVID investments.

Measures adopted to fight the coronavirus are opening new investment opportunities serving health and environmental goals. Moving people and goods across the landscape is one of Canada's highest sources of greenhouse gas emissions. **Rethinking delivery systems** could springboard off the explosion of home delivery. Small-truck delivery fleets are well-suited to electrification; consolidating deliveries, coordinating logistics, improving the filling rates of trucks and offering flexible delivery hours could help reduce car dependency. Some cities have widened sidewalks and pedestrianised streets to facilitate social distancing. The recovery is thus a great time to fund **complete streets and roads** with wide sidewalks, green infrastructure and bicycle lanes. This will favour active transportation in urban, peri-urban and rural Canada where such infrastructure is largely absent. Ensuring **universal access to high-speed internet** is also a necessity in a world that demands working from home.

Existing programs that could rapidly be leveraged include the Infrastructure Program with its Climate Lens and the National Housing Strategy. Here are other examples of "no regrets" investment:

To accelerate the **transition to renewable and low-carbon energy**, funding and innovation in governance are needed for a range of technologies, ownership and benefit models. Investments can help overcome the hurdles of upfront capital and make energy systems more flexible, while diversifying our energy economies. Such investments must respect the free, prior and informed consent of Indigenous peoples and governance of their territories.

Investment in **green infrastructure** offers a novel way to climate-proof watersheds and coasts against flooding and communities against heatwaves. This includes networks of green technologies, spaces and natural systems, from wetlands to woodlots to conservation areas, that are connected, multi-functional and provide multiple ecosystem services.

A **national program of whole house energy retrofits** will reduce energy demand and costs for building owners and renters. As working from home becomes the new normal, these retrofits could improve comfort and reduce energy poverty and the cost of living. As new construction will likely slow down, while some public buildings are closed, the potential for job creation via whole energy retrofits is considerable. Such investments can address Indigenous peoples' housing crisis on- and off-reserve.

Facilitating the development of a **climate-literate construction workforce** should be a key part of Canada's recovery investments en route to a low-carbon economy. High-quality, low-carbon construction requires a workplace culture that emphasizes reducing energy consumption. Major investments in developing new and upgraded climate-related construction skills is a key opportunity to expand equity, diversity and inclusion in the workforce while promoting greener practices and technologies. If climate literacy is an integral part of workers' training, the industry can establish new skill requirements to ensure that newly trained workers can find the good quality jobs they expect and have the capacity to effectively contribute to Canada's climate objectives. Upskilling workforces must address violence against women and open the road to take advantage of the important contributions that Indigenous workers and women can make to the green new economy.

Future-proofing Canada against catastrophes like climate change is also about strengthening its resilience. We need to understand how shocks like COVID-19 propagate, as well as the consequences of our responses. For example, if working from home persists, we should understand the consequences of remote working on urban and rural real estate, the development/construction industry, transportation systems, food transport and delivery, bars and restaurants, and more. We, scholars from Sustainable Canada Dialogues, offer to bring to Canada's post-COVID response team our understanding of complex systems, identification of leverage points for positive change and reflection on strategies and approaches that are health-enhancing and economically robust for an array of unpredictable futures.

COVID-19 has shown that Canadians are resilient, socially conscious and willing to tolerate short-term pain for long-term societal good. Let's spring Canada forward with innovation and investment to make our society inclusive, just, climate-resilient and economically strong.

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