

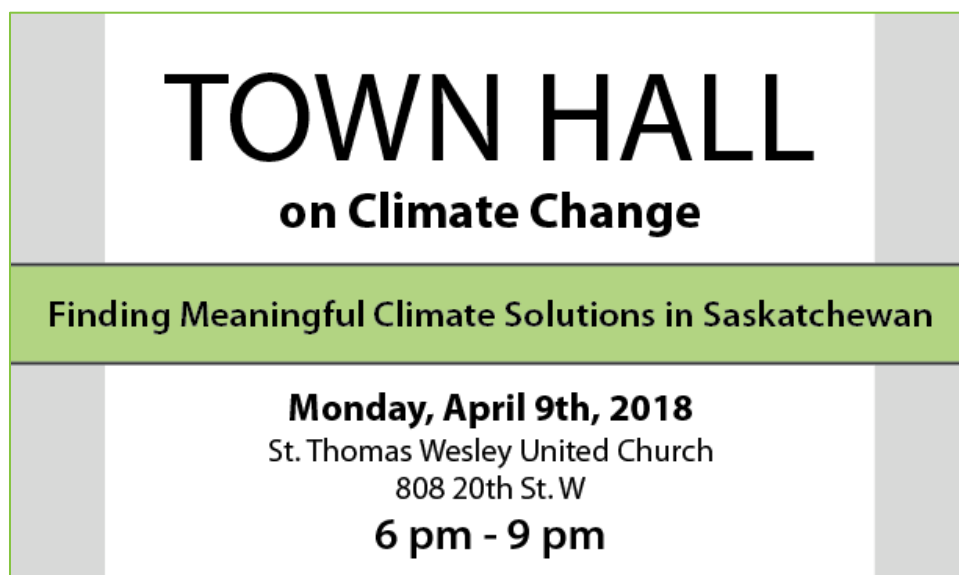
# Finding Meaningful Climate Solutions in Saskatchewan

Report on the April 2018 Saskatoon town hall meeting on climate change



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**TOWN HALL**  
**on Climate Change**

**Finding Meaningful Climate Solutions in Saskatchewan**

**Monday, April 9th, 2018**  
St. Thomas Wesley United Church  
808 20th St. W  
**6 pm - 9 pm**

Poster for the Town Hall meeting

## INTRODUCTION

On April 9, 2018, Climate Justice Saskatoon hosted a town hall meeting at St. Thomas Wesley United Church in Saskatoon. The event was co-sponsored by the Church, The Stand Community Organizing Centre and SEIU-West, and was attended by approximately 115 community members.

This meeting was organized for two purposes. First, to update attendees on the latest climate change projections as well as the latest federal and provincial climate policies after the release of both the Pan-Canadian Framework on Clean Growth and Climate Change, to which Saskatchewan is the lone provincial hold-out, and Prairie Resilience, the Saskatchewan Party's climate change strategy. Second, to foster in depth discussions and gather feedback from participants on what key elements must be part of a justice-based climate change strategy for Saskatchewan.

Following a short presentation by Climate Justice Saskatoon (CJS), participants divided into groups to discuss various topics including: agriculture and land use; carbon pricing; energy poverty; Indigenous rights, justice and reconciliation; international responsibilities; just transition and labour rights; renewable energy and energy efficiency; and transportation. This report briefly summarizes key points and concepts from the CJS presentation – more detailed information can be found in the reports cited herein; this report then moves on to summarize the key recommendations for each of the topics outlined above – it is important to reiterate that these recommendations stem from discussions involving more than 100 community members.

Photos and video from the event are available at [climatejusticesaskatoon.ca](http://climatejusticesaskatoon.ca).

Questions or comments about this report can be directed to CJS via [climateactionsk@gmail.com](mailto:climateactionsk@gmail.com) or by mail at the following address:

Climate Justice Saskatoon  
C/O The Stand Community Organizing Centre  
615 Main St, Saskatoon SK  
S7H 0J8

Climate Justice Saskatoon is a growing collective of people in and around Saskatoon who recognize both the severity and urgency of the climate crisis, which demands immediate and bold action, and the ways in which the climate crisis intersects with and cannot be solved in isolation from other crises such as colonialism, inequality and racism.

Town hall co-sponsors:



## WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT CLIMATE CHANGE

*It's warming* – 17 of the 18 warmest years on record have occurred since 2001

*It's us* – the main cause of the current warming trend is human expansion of the “greenhouse effect”

*It's bad* – climate change is expected to flood cities, devastate food production, cause wide-ranging health impacts, exacerbate pre-existing conflicts and have a much greater impact on those with less access to power

*We're sure* – the raw data and software used to produce our temperature data is publically available and has been tested both inside and outside of government agencies, around the world

*We can fix it if we hurry* – it is technically possible to limit global average temperature rise to well below 2°C if we peak emissions soon and steadily reduce them

## THE PARIS AGREEMENT

The Paris Agreement of 2015 set a global target of “holding the increase in the global average temperature to *well below 2°C* above pre-industrial levels and to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase to *1.5°C* above pre-industrial levels, recognizing that this would significantly reduce the risks and impacts of climate change.” The Agreement also committed to “reflect equity and the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities, in the light of different national circumstances.”

The Agreement urged a peak in emissions “as soon as possible” and subsequent “rapid reductions thereafter in accordance with best available science... on the basis of equity, and in the context of sustainable development and efforts to eradicate poverty.”

## FUTURE SCENARIOS

The world will look very different in the future depending on the actions we take today; the extent of and effects of climate change can be mitigated by acting now. The Paris Agreement strives to limit warming to 1.5°C understanding the difference between the following scenarios.

### 4°C

Business-as-usual will lead to 4°C or more in warming above pre-industrial global average temperatures; this will lead to:

- substantial species extinction
- extensive loss of ecosystem functioning
- substantial risks to global and regional food security
- high temperature and humidity compromising normal human activities, including growing food or working outdoors in some areas for parts of the year
- significant global sea rise threatening small island states and coastal communities
- substantial danger to passing “tipping points,” activating feedback loops that drive further climate change

### 1.5°C – 2°C

Even a change of 1.5°C will have significant impacts, but there is a substantial difference between 1.5°C and 2°C:

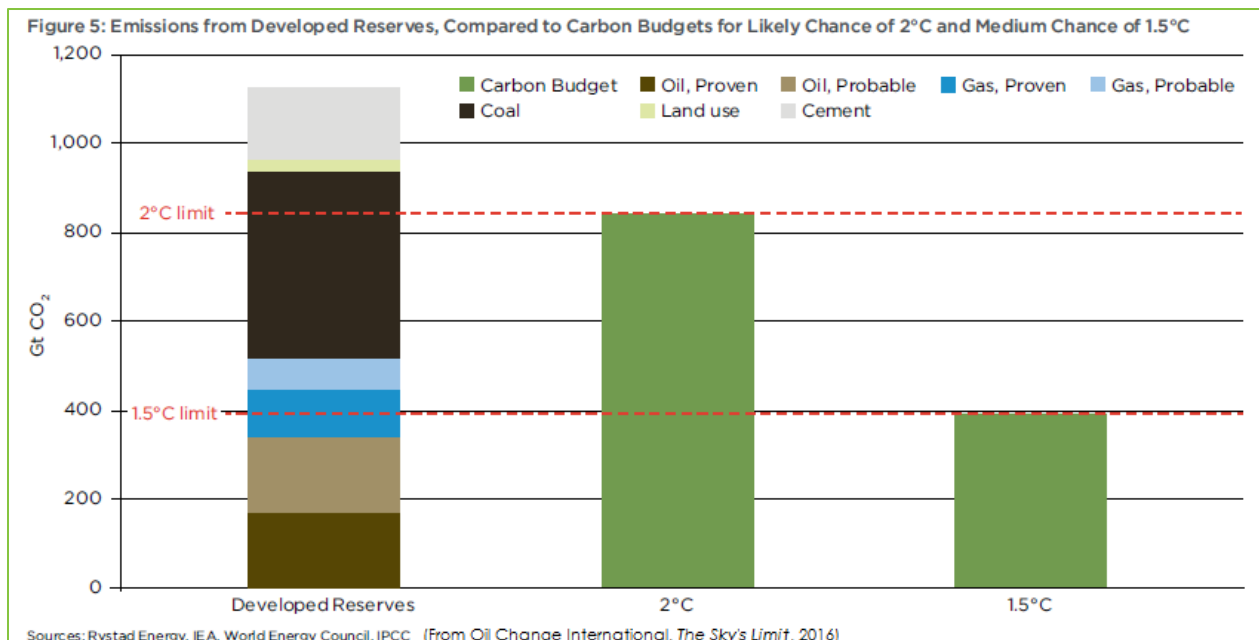
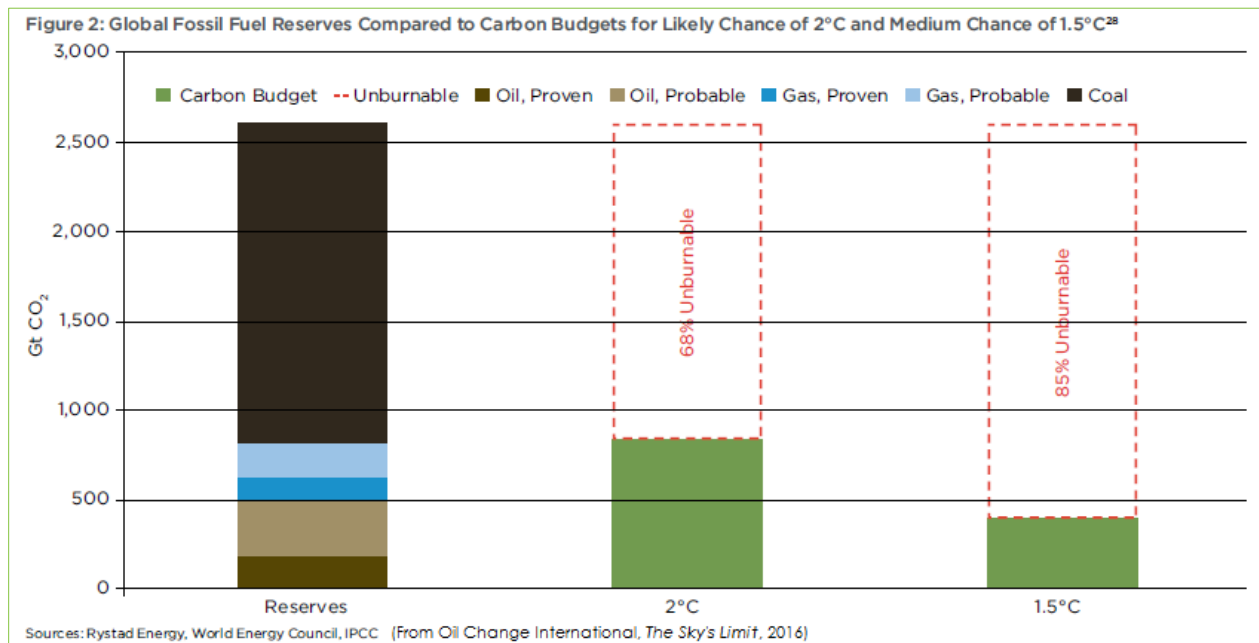
- extent of sea-level rise
- extent of coral loss, and other ecosystem damage
- frequency and extent of extreme weather events (e.g. floods, droughts, wildfires, etc.)
- intensity of heat extremes, particularly in Africa, South America and Southeast Asia
- intensity of dry periods, particularly around the Mediterranean, in Central America, the Amazon and southern Africa (and therefore the impact on crop yields)

## CARBON BUDGETS

Carbon budgets are a conceptual tool that allow us to calculate how much more anthropogenic carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) we can emit in order to achieve a certain probability of meeting a particular target for limiting warming.

- in 2012 the IPCC's best estimate of a carbon budget to achieve a 67% chance of limiting warming to 2°C was 1,000 billion tonnes (Gt); this was revised to 800Gt in 2018
- to achieve a 50% chance of staying below 1.5°C: 350Gt
- known fossil fuel reserves total approximately 3,000Gt, meaning the vast majority of these must be left in the ground in order to achieve a reasonable probability of meeting global targets

Therefore, in addition to demand side (consumption) measures such as conservation and efficiency improvements, a rapid shift to zero-emissions energy and electricity production and so on, meeting global targets also has significant implications for fossil fuel production.



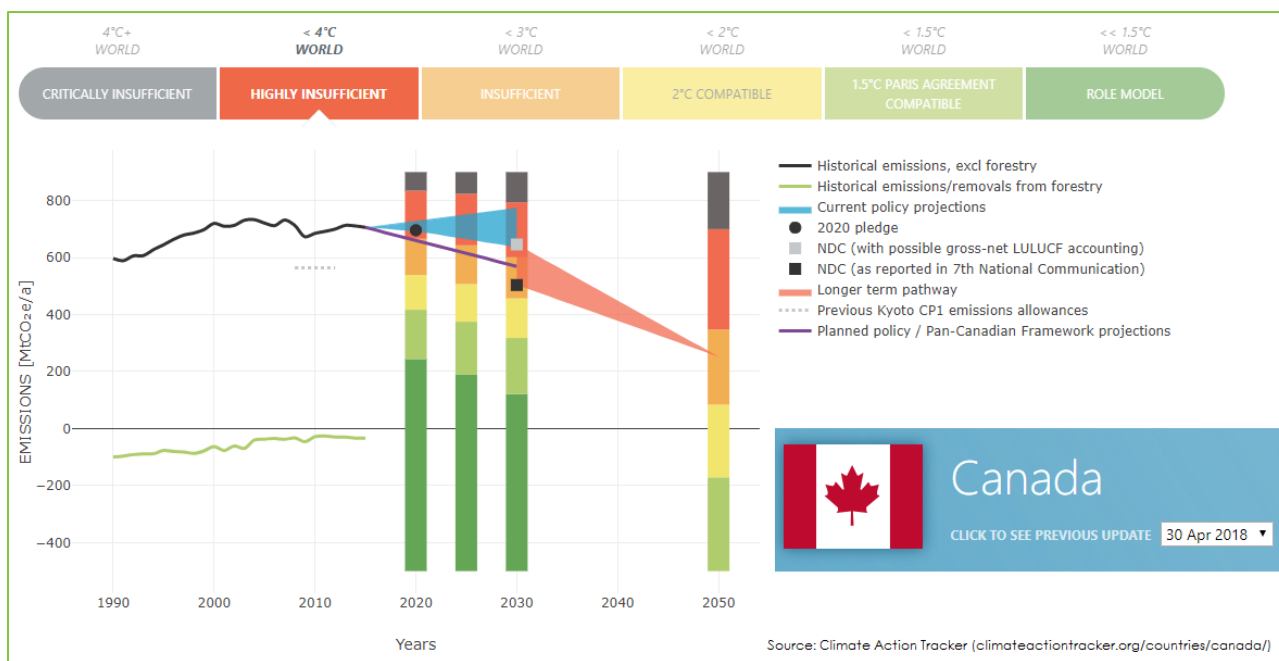
If this global carbon budget was divided among countries equally, disregarding historical emissions, Canada would exhaust its share in 7 years at current rates of emissions; this would take Saskatchewan just 2 years.

### CURRENT POLICY CLIMATE

The Paris Agreement calls for signatories to submit their own nationally determined contributions (NDCs) and to continually strengthen their NDCs in the coming years. Canada has submitted its own NDCs, but has also made room for significant responsibility at the provincial level.

### FEDERAL POLICY

The federal government has developed a Pan-Canadian Framework on Clean Growth and Climate Change with a goal of reducing economy-wide emissions by 30% below 2005 levels by 2030; Climate Action Tracker has rated this NDC as “highly insufficient” – incompatible with limiting warming below even 3°C.

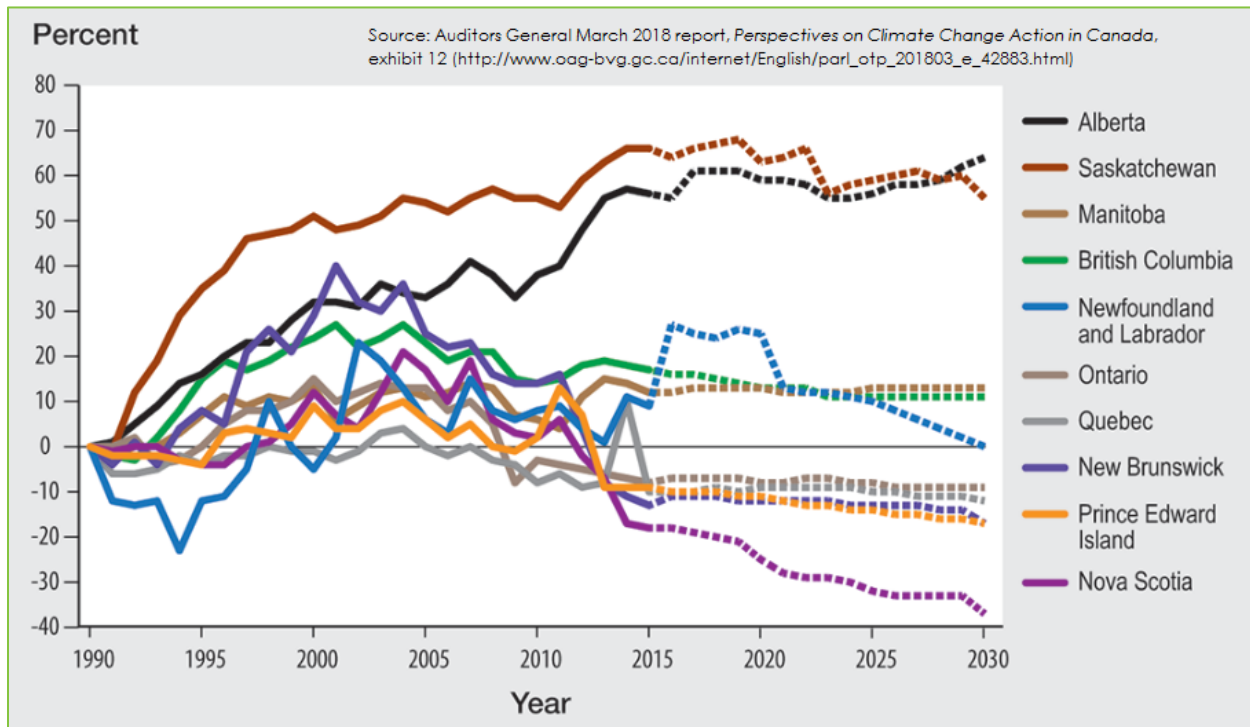


To add to that, Canada’s own projections show a gap of 66Mt in meeting this inadequate target – current policy can be expected to reduce annual emissions to 583Mt by 2030, while the national target is 517Mt by that date. While Canada has been a vocal advocate for climate action on the international stage, clearly there is much work to be done to match such ambition with action; it is important to note that it is within this national context that provincial policy is being developed.

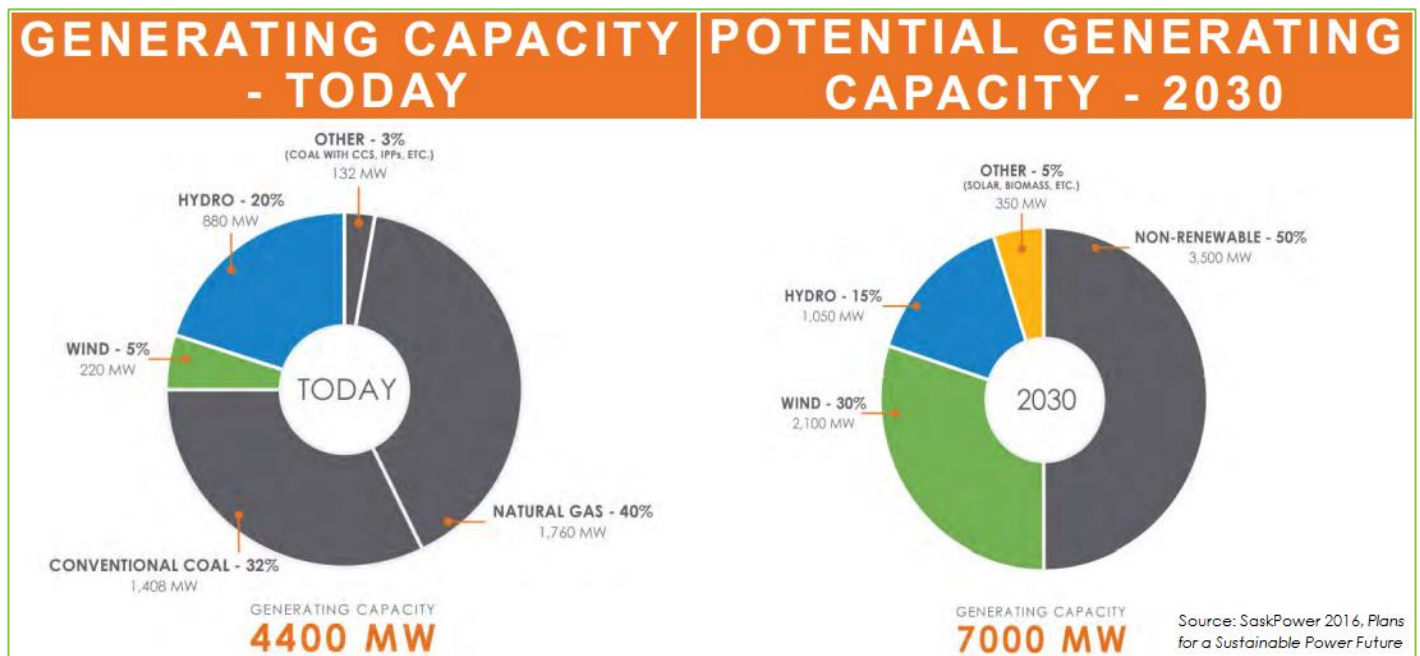
### PROVINCIAL POLICY

Saskatchewan is responsible for a disproportionate share of emissions in Canada with the highest per capita emissions in the country (at 67.6 tonnes per capita it is more than 3 times the national average of approximately 20 tonnes per capita). Its absolute emissions grew approximately 66% between 1990 and 2015, the fastest rate of growth in the country; Alberta’s rate is second highest at 56% (see image on page 5).

Following the release of its White Paper on Climate Change in 2016, the Saskatchewan Party government released a climate change strategy, entitled *Prairie Resilience*, in December 2017. A detailed examination of *Prairie Resilience* can be found on our website. In brief, the plan can be considered at best a step in the right direction and should be considered a work in progress. It places a heavy emphasis on adaptation over mitigation, or reducing emissions, and is presently missing clear targets and strategies for implementation and monitoring.



Part of the provincial plan is achieving 50% renewable generating capacity by 2030; while a positive step, it is important to note that this is within the context of an expected 60% increase in overall generating capacity, which therefore relies on a 10% increase in non-renewable generating capacity – in other words, an expansion of non-renewable power generation in addition to an expansion of renewable power generation.



The 2018 Auditors General assessment of climate change action in Saskatchewan found that, while the province is now developing policy to reduce emissions and is developing a coordinated adaptation plan, there were several problematic areas, such as:

- absence of an emissions reduction target for 2020
- absence of an emissions reduction target for 2030
- provincial mitigation plan not implemented
- provincial risk assessment not undertaken
- provincial adaptation plan not implemented
- no regular reporting on provincial GHG sources

## DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Starting from a justice-based framework for addressing climate change, several priority topics were identified and town hall participants had the opportunity to participate in multiple group discussions around those topics. Each of those discussions produced a short set of guiding recommendations, which are summarized below.

### AGRICULTURE AND LAND USE

Agriculture accounts for approximately one quarter of Saskatchewan's GHG emissions; it is also a significant economic driver in the province. Agriculture and land use are bound to play a substantial role in provincial efforts to mitigate and adapt to climate change. However, in general strong policy linking climate and agriculture are weak or absent and there is a need to develop such policy to protect both the climate and the agricultural sector. Key discussion points on this topic included:

- We must develop policies to restrict high-input, energy intensive, high-acreage farming; instead, we must cultivate a more diverse agriculture sector – organic farming, urban food production, and the use of techniques like short rotational grazing, which increase soil carbon sequestration – and can start by changing subsidies (e.g. eliminating the PST exemption on nitrogen fertilizer)
- There must be efforts at financial reform that make capital investment accessible for non-conventional farming initiatives (e.g. mandating that a certain percentage of farm loans are provided to small farms and providing low-interest farm loans)
- There must be an immediate moratorium on the breaking of natural areas and the draining of semi-permanent wetlands to enhance carbon sequestration; eliminating property taxes on native grassland and incentives to graze natural areas would also be highly beneficial

### CARBON PRICING

While Saskatchewan has been obstinate on the issue of carbon pricing, it is a central pillar of federal climate policy and the province risks having an outside model imposed if it does not formulate a plan internally. Lengthy court battles are bound to waste both money and time, unacceptably delaying further necessary action. Key discussion points on this topic included:

- In general, we must move away from an obsessive low-tax regime that leaves little for public spending; sensible and fair taxation is critical for transitioning our energy system
- We must design a system that is fair and balanced, requiring more of large-emitters, industry in particular, and providing relief to low-income citizens
- We must focus on what to do with carbon pricing revenues – for example investing in renewable energy infrastructure, retraining for fossil fuel workers, Indigenous communities, and rebates for low-income community members and families

### ENERGY POVERTY

Electricity prices are rising by approximately 5% per year, and gas prices are notoriously unstable. Extreme cold and a lack of rigorous building standards leave low-income people vulnerable to energy poverty. This needs to be considered in climate policy development to ensure that the province's most vulnerable citizens are not burdened by this necessary transition or literally left in the cold. Key discussion points on this topic included:

- Focus on building energy efficient, low-income housing to reduce energy costs and improve housing quality
- Focus also on housing retrofits – improving the efficiency of existing developments; this can be mandated and incentivized
- Provide relief for low-income community members and families through royalty rebates, carbon pricing revenues and/or shifting subsidies away from oil and gas development

## INDIGENOUS RIGHTS, JUSTICE AND RECONCILIATION

The territory currently known as Saskatchewan was settled through Treaty agreements with various First Nations, which outline a relationship based on sharing the land. In this era of so-called reconciliation, it is imperative that policy take seriously inherent Indigenous rights to the land and be formulated with justice for all communities in mind. Key discussion points on this topic included:

- Formally recognizing and implementing the policies and recommendations of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission are critical steps; both of these have implications for decision-making and climate policy development
- Indigenous communities and elders must be included in the development of robust climate policy; not only are they impacted by climate change and policies to address it, but Indigenous ways of knowing must also be considered in policy development
- We must return to and honour the Treaty relationship, which will include investing in Indigenous communities – healing in these communities will help to heal the air, land, and water we all depend on; this also includes ending attempts to municipalize First Nations

## INTERNATIONAL RESPONSIBILITY

The Paris Agreement includes the transfer of funds from high-income, typically high-emitting countries to low-income, typically low-emitting countries, to address the following areas: loss and damage, or resilience to ongoing climate impacts; adaptation, or building resilience for greater climate impacts; and low-carbon economic development, or economic development driven by renewable energy rather than fossil fuels. This justice-based approach acknowledges the unequal impacts of climate change and was pushed for by the Climate Vulnerable Forum, a coalition of 43 countries. Key discussion points on this topic included:

- We must recognize our disproportionate contribution to climate change through extremely high per-capita emissions; in addition to transferring funds and technology to other countries we have a responsibility to rapidly reduce our own emissions
- Saskatchewan must develop policy that welcomes refugees and migrants, including those fleeing climate-impacted regions
- In general, it is imperative to listen to and support the most climate-vulnerable communities when developing policy, including members of the Climate Vulnerable Forum and global Indigenous communities

## JUST TRANSITION AND LABOUR RIGHTS

Workers in fossil fuel industries have been impacted tremendously in recent years by a highly volatile market. These jobs will also be impacted by a transition to new energy sources. However, there is mounting evidence that a renewable energy economy can offer more jobs per unit of investment. Moreover, a transition can only be made easier by centering worker and community interests and concerns in policy development. Key discussion points on this topic included:

- Planning is critical to helping workers and communities transition away from fossil fuel dependence; the province needs a comprehensive plan to support workers and communities including increased benefits and retraining opportunities
- In addition to building renewable energy infrastructure, the province must consider the process of cleaning up winding-down fossil fuel infrastructure and projects (e.g. abandoned oil wells) when evaluating the employment potential in transitioning; there are countless opportunities
- Agriculture is another sector with the potential to absorb workers; the province should incentivize lower-input labour-intensive farming and food production initiatives

## RENEWABLE ENERGY AND ENERGY EFFICIENCY

Saskatchewan has abundant renewable resource potential, particularly in solar and wind power. The province currently has a goal of achieving 50% renewable generating capacity by 2030, indicating some ambition to invest in a renewable energy future. Key discussion points on this topic included:

- We must raise our ambition in developing renewable energy infrastructure; the current target includes an expansion of non-renewable infrastructure that may ultimately delay the transition to renewable energy
- We must develop better incentives for home retrofitting and residential renewable energy options like solar panels
- We must adopt more stringent building codes; while Prairie Resilience at last adopts the 2015 National Building Code, there are much stricter standards we need to be working towards including passive standards

## TRANSPORTATION

This topic area is complicated as it is split among federal, provincial, and municipal jurisdictions and efforts to address it must take into account technology, infrastructure, and urban planning. However, transportation accounts for approximately one seventh of the province's emissions. Key discussion points on this topic included:

- Robust and reliable public transportation is critical, both within urban centres and between them and rural areas; a provincial bus service must be re-instated
- We must expand renewable transportation options, including renewable-powered charging stations for electric cars
- We must limit urban sprawl, starting with shifting subsidies away from expansive growth; there must be more focus on in-fill development

## CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

That Saskatchewan has released its own climate change strategy is a positive step in recognizing the need for climate action and laying groundwork for a robust response. As this report indicates, there are many intersecting areas that need to be addressed if that response is to be as just as possible for all communities in the province, and there is much work to be done to strengthen provincial policy along these lines. Moreover, this town hall shows, as recent research in Saskatchewan has indicated, that there is real interest in and readiness to discuss a transition away from fossil fuels in this province; indeed, such conversations are long overdue.

## CITATIONS

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