

Trudeau's 2030 Climate Plan looks for Solutions in All the Wrong Places

The Liberals are still operating like we have decades, not years, to solve the climate crisis

By [Burgess Langshaw-Power](#)

Global Research, March 31, 2022

[Canadian Dimension](#) 30 March 2022

Region: [Canada](#)

Theme: [Environment](#), [Oil and Energy](#)

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On March 29, the Government of Canada released its new [emissions reduction plan](#). The document is filled with spending promises and ambitious targets, but it's important to step back and ask whether anything about the plan is achievable.

The report outlines how Canada will, "reduce emissions across the entire economy to reach our emissions reduction target of 40 to 45 percent below 2005 levels by 2030 and put us on a path to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050." While this aspirational goal is commendable, it is divorced from the reality that, according to Environment and Climate Change Canada, we have not yet even begun to lower our total national emissions. As stated in a report published in 2021, "Canada's total GHG emissions in 2019 were 730 megatonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent (Mt CO₂ eq), a slight increase from 728 Mt CO₂ eq in 2018."

Our emissions may even be higher than estimated, as new research shows that [fugitive emissions](#) from sources like natural gas may be orders of magnitude [larger than currently accounted for](#). Similarly, the [Climate Action Tracker](#) (an independent scientific collaboration between Climate Analytics and the NewClimate Institute) states that, "We rate Canada's policies and action as 'Highly Insufficient' when compared to modelled domestic pathways."

So, where does the government believe these massive emissions cuts can be made?

The 2030 plan begins with a focus on homes and buildings, which together represent approximately 13 percent of Canada's total emissions. However, updating model codes for buildings and supporting large-scale and expensive home retrofits in an already problematic era of skyrocketing property values will require vast amounts of resources in a world already strained by supply chain disruptions and intensifying geo-political instability.

A key cornerstone of the plan is related to the oil and gas sector and the spectrum of

technologies known as carbon capture, utilization, and storage (CCUS), with a complementary investment tax credit to incentivize their development and adoption. While CCUS has the potential to decrease or mitigate the carbon emissions from a variety of industrial processes from concrete production to oil extraction, experts are dubious about its potential to significantly lower Canada's overall carbon footprint.

Prior to the release of the Trudeau government's 2030 plan, over 400 Canadian climate scientists and other academics (myself included) [signed a letter](#) calling on the federal government to reject the introduction of tax credits for CCUS technologies on the grounds that, "Despite decades of research, CCUS is neither economically sound nor proven at scale, with a terrible track record and limited potential to deliver significant, cost-effective emissions reductions."

Why are experts so skeptical about a purported overreliance on these technologies to purify Canada's carbon stream? Several independent reports have found that existing CCUS innovations have [failed to meet their targets](#) according to numerous metrics, and none are on track to be met. In fact, one report found that carbon capture projects can even [increase total emissions](#). For some, this may conjure memories of the failed American drive for 'clean coal,' which proved to be a billion dollar boondoggle, or other missteps in [Australia](#) and [here in Canada](#)—all backed by [huge amounts of public investment](#).

The fact is that despite oil prices returning to strong levels and [possible future reductions in costs](#), CCUS is not economically viable. Even if it were financially practicable, it would [take precious resources away](#) from other, proven technologies such as renewable energy. In other words, by the time we [develop new CCUS to a scale](#) where it would have any significant impact, it will likely be [too late](#).

Regrettably, the Trudeau government has chosen to implement new subsidies to attempt to force the technology into wider adoption under the guise that "climate action must go hand in hand with keeping life affordable for Canadians and creating good jobs." However, the question must be asked: who is paying for these subsidies? No new taxes on the oil and gas sector are identified as part of Canada's new climate action plan. Instead the report implores the fossil fuel sector to do its part: "Canada's oil and gas industry is currently generating record cash flow. If deployed strategically, these funds could enhance carbon competitiveness and enable the sector to do its fair share in contributing to the country's climate goals."

This is a toothless statement directed at an industry that, with few exceptions, has shown virtually no willingness to engage in real climate action.

Despite decades of [boldfaced lies](#) by oil and gas companies about their contributions to tackling global warming, the 'polluter pays' principle has yet to be forced upon the extractive sector—the same firms that have for decades reaped record profits despite abandoning their messes both in the form of [orphaned wells](#) and climate harms. It is clear, to cite the Parkland Institute's Kevin Taft's [historic warning](#), that the conventional energy sector has fully captured and harnessed the institutions of democracy for its own use.

Nor is there any explanation of where funding for the billions of dollars for other programs will come from. At a time when the Liberal government is emerging from under a burden of historic stimulus spending in the wake of the COVID crisis, announcing negotiations to [buy a](#)

[fleet of F-35 fighter jets](#), and entering into a cooperation agreement with the NDP that will see the introduction of dental and pharmacare, one might question the scope of the government's fiscal flexibility. This isn't to say that more spending is unjustified—indeed, the cost of doing nothing will [far outweigh](#) the costs of climate action.

Of course, CCUS has real-world applications and is far from a useless technology (I have been too critical of its uses [in the past](#)), and it will likely have a sustained future in certain industries where emissions are more or less unavoidable, or as a stepping stone to [carbon dioxide removal](#) or direct air capture which can be used to gradually undo industrial emissions. The problem is that every moment we take from engaging in real action pushes us toward greater extremes, like increasingly severe natural disasters such as last year's [fire and flood cycle](#) in British Columbia, or the possibility of deploying [solar geoengineering](#).

And while the Trudeau government should be applauded for other initiatives such as supporting farmers and agri-producers and funding clean energy and energy efficiency projects [led by Indigenous peoples](#), it is clear this larger climate plan is mostly one of not rocking the boat—and hoping things work out. Rather than investing wholeheartedly in a just and equitable transition (there is some funding earmarked for renewable energy), we are stuck placating the oil and gas sector with solutions that go nowhere near the material dismantling of fossil capital that is required to avert climate catastrophe.

Perhaps now is the time to take a step back and reassess. If the government is going to commit [over \\$9 billion](#) towards climate action, it needs to be targeted at programs that will quickly and effectively reduce emissions. Unfortunately, this means that our grandiose strategy of planting billions of trees is probably [all for naught](#), as is hoping the oil and gas sector will do its part voluntarily. Ultimately, relying too heavily upon silver bullet technologies like CCUS to make a sizable difference is a fantasy that relies on other future, unproven innovations like nuclear fusion or even [small modular reactors](#).

The steps we must take will be painful. They will cost jobs, and they will involve sacrificing some of the comforts we've become accustomed to. First and foremost, real climate action must start with the [rapid phase out](#) of oil and gas production in Canada. And despite the [protestations](#) of former Alberta Premier Rachel Notley, such a [transition](#) is indeed [possible](#).

As one of the world's [worst climate offenders](#), we have a responsibility to act, and earn a reputation for leadership which others may follow. Until real action is taken, any plan will be nothing more than thoughts and prayers.

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Burgess Langshaw Power is a former policy analyst currently completing his PhD in Global Governance at the Balsillie School, University of Waterloo. His policy expertise includes climate interventions and energy technologies. Views expressed here are his own and not necessarily those of his school or employer.

Featured image: Carbon capture, utilization and storage features heavily in the Trudeau government's new climate plan, but critics question whether it represents another gift to to the oil and gas industry. Photo by Claudia Otte/Fotolia.

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