

March 3, 2017

Advisory Panel on Coal Communities
c/o Alexis Milinusic
Stakeholder Engagement Lead
Economic Development and Trade
5th Floor Commerce Place
10155 – 102 Street
Edmonton, AB T5J 4L6
alexis.milinusic@gov.ab.ca

Re: Advisory Panel on Coal Communities

Dear Advisory Panel Members,

Blue Green Canada is an alliance between Canadian labour unions, environmental and civil society organizations that advocates for working people and the environment by promoting solutions to environmental issues that have positive employment and economic impacts. Our membership includes the United Steelworkers, Unifor, Environmental Defence, the Columbia Institute, Clean Energy Canada, the Broadbent Institute, and the Pembina Institute.

Working to ensure a just transition for workers and communities is increasingly important as Alberta implements the Climate Leadership Plan. Blue Green Canada is working with our labour and environmental member organizations, in Alberta and across the country, to help advance the conversations and plans for impacted workers and communities. We hope to be collaborators and contributors in the planned transition away from coal.

Alberta is at the beginning of a new chapter in its economic history, with new jobs and new industries available for development. Existing occupations will continue, and new opportunities will open up. We encourage the Alberta Government to take advantage of these opportunities and at the same time, address the challenges posed by these economic changes by meeting the needs of workers, families, and communities for support during the transition.

Please find enclosed a summary report on the *Just Transition and Good Green Jobs for Alberta* conference we held on October 17, 2016 at the Chateau Lacombe hotel in Edmonton. The conference brought together more than 150 workers, environmentalists, government representatives, and other decision-makers to discuss key issues including the impacts of the phase-out of coal-fired electricity generation, what is needed for a just transition, job training opportunities, the growth potential of renewable energy, the importance of energy efficiency, and the opportunity to create good green jobs for Albertans.

Key themes that emerged from our conference are the following:

1) Job losses are an increasingly pressing issue that needs to be addressed: This issue was top of mind in discussions throughout the day. People know that commodity trends have been hitting the coal sector hard. The unlocking of alternative sources of energy at lower prices such as fracking and shale gas has resulted in lower prices for natural gas. As well, prices for solar and wind have been falling with increasing economies of scale as markets grow. This has made it hard for coal-fired electricity to compete and has already impacted jobs in the coal sector.

2) Just Transition is about fairness, and a strong economy: Transitioning off of coal-fired electricity generation will benefit all of society through reduced greenhouse gas emissions, and improved air quality and health. The core principle of Just Transition is that when policy changes benefit society broadly, the costs of those changes must be shared, and not imposed disproportionately on workers in the affected sectors or on the affected communities. A Just Transition involves broader conversations and a focus on the economy. It needs to address not only workers, but whole communities. As workers and communities are diverse and varied in terms of capacity and need, this will require transitions to be tailor-made, with ongoing and active engagement in the design and implementation processes.

3) We need to learn from the successes and failures elsewhere: We have lessons from the past with the East coast fisheries, the forestry sector, and mining communities where transitions didn't achieve the desired results. Alberta is in the position of being able to learn from the mistakes, borrow the best ideas from other jurisdictions, and to innovate at home. It is important to pro-actively engage with the unions that have been part of previous processes as well as the broader communities at all stages of the transition. As well, we have seen that training without the end goal of a decent job can be pointless, demoralizing and damaging. It is not adequate to provide short term, low quality training for low end service jobs and consider that a transition as has been seen in other cases. There is an abundance of experience regarding transition and adjustment programs. Much of that experience has not been positive. But, there is no excuse for not getting it right this time.

4) Labour has an important role to play: Unions are a vital partner. They are working now through collaboratives and individually to not just protect but to improve lives and jobs. Union experience needs to be at the table to ensure worker's perspectives and stories are heard from. There should be concentrated efforts made to learn from, broaden and expand successful union training programs to ensure high quality training leads to high quality jobs.

5) **There is an enormous opportunity in good green jobs:** Good green jobs can help address the need for employment options as we transition to a green economy. These jobs exist across many sectors including, manufacturing, construction, and trades, and more jobs can be created through an increased commitment to renewable power and energy efficiency. According to a Pembina Institute analysis, investments in renewable sources of electricity and energy efficiency alone would generate more jobs than those lost through the retirement of coal-fired electric power.

6) **A Just Transition is do-able:** The Alberta Government’s commitment of \$195 million of carbon levy funding to “assist coal communities, Indigenous communities and others transition to a cleaner economy” is commendable and represents clear leadership toward a just transition. This commitment in transitioning and diversifying the economy should be recognized as one of many needed actions toward success. National funding for just transition is also necessary and must be brought to the table from the many revenue options the federal government has at its disposal. Our governments can and should also use regulation to protect workers and communities and ensure transitioning employers are required to help laid off workers, and remain partners in their surrounding communities.

We believe that the work of the Advisory Panel on Coal Communities is crucial for Alberta’s transition away from coal-fired electricity generation. Blue Green Canada and our member organizations in Alberta, and across the country, wish to offer our continued support and participation in the important and challenging work ahead.

Sincerely,



Jamie Kirkpatrick
Program Manager
Blue Green Canada
116 Spadina Avenue, Suite 300
Toronto, ON M5V 2K6
jkirkpatrick@bluegreencanada.ca