

The Big Hurdle: Fossil Fuels

How optimistic many of us were after the Paris Climate Agreement in 2015! Global leaders were finally discussing common climate issues and setting specific goals to reduce carbon emissions. Canada's Parliament ratified our commitment to this legally binding international agreement in 2016. We were hopeful and proud of Canada's participation.

In September 2019 at a Climate Emergency Rally in Waterloo Public Square inspired by climate activist Greta Thunberg, thousands of us joined millions worldwide to make noise about the ongoing need for climate action. As a teacher, I remember riding to this rally on the recently completed ION train with students from a local Catholic high school. We took with us a huge cardboard image of the late Pope Francis who had written *Laudato Si*, a letter emphasizing the need to take better care of creation.

Then COVID-19 struck, demanding the world's attention. An American president upended global trade and order, creating an affordability crisis and, on top of that, instigating wars in the Middle East. And while it's understandable that the climate crisis isn't top of mind for some, we ignore it at our own peril.

It's 2026. How is Canada doing in reaching its goals? We're making some progress but are not on track to meet our 2050 net zero emissions target. Climate Action Tracker, an independent organization tracking each country's contribution to the Paris Agreement goals, gives Canada its lowest rating – "Highly Insufficient".

At last November's COP30 climate meetings in Belém, Brazil, the final document didn't mention fossil fuels at all, despite a clear understanding that burning coal, oil and gas contributes by far the most carbon emissions.

How could this have happened? A major obstacle was lobbying by the fossil fuel industry which has substantial financial resources and believes it has a lot to lose.

The good news is that two countries, Colombia and The Netherlands, have taken the courageous step of leading the world's first international conference on transitioning away from fossil fuels, happening April 24-29 in Santa Marta, Colombia (see <https://transitionawayconference.com>). They are being joined by 22 other countries committed to an equitable transition. To date, Canada has not indicated that it will be officially represented at a high level.

The focus of the conference will be on finding practical ways to implement this crucial transition. Specific themes include shifting subsidies to promote cleaner energy and enabling a just transition for people dependent on fossil fuels.

We're not hearing much about this conference and Canada's participation in it. True, our economy is highly reliant on fossil fuel exports. So are the emerging economies of Mexico,

Colombia and Nigeria who will be there. As Environmental Defence Canada convincingly argues, the fossil fuel industry itself could invest in renewable energy. Renewable, clean energy is a huge plus both for the climate and for national security.

Given the crisis in our water supply, we in Waterloo Region know what happens when we don't take care of our natural resources.

In addition to addressing other global and local issues, it is critical that we tackle our climate goals. Join us in writing to politicians at all levels strongly voicing support for a just transition to a safe climate future. Share with friends, co-workers and family the climate-friendly choices we can make in our own lives. As Pope Francis says in *Laudato Si*, the whole human family needs to work together to care for planet earth - it's the only home we have.

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