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Prime Minister Stephen Harper
Office of the Prime Minister
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Prime Minister Harper,

The current generation of decision-makers is in an unprecedented position: we now know enough about climate science to be able to anticipate the consequences of our energy choices for members of future generations, furthermore we are now in the critical years when we must choose between continued reliance on fossil fuels, which will impoverish and endanger future generations of Canadians and others around the world, or undertake a switch to low-carbon energy technologies that can serve as the basis for human prosperity indefinitely. As a man who cares about the future of Canada and Canadians, as well as a father whose children will need to live in the world we are creating, I urge you to change course and desist from the shortsighted promotion of fossil fuel energy. If we are to keep warming below the 2°C

‘dangerous’ threshold that Canada has endorsed along with most major world governments, we cannot be building new oil sands projects, pressing for new export pipelines, embracing hydraulic fracturing, or drilling in ultra deep water and the arctic. Instead, we need to devise and implement a sensible plan to phase out the fossil fuel infrastructure we already have. The scientific conclusion is plain: the world has already burned a dangerous amount of fossil fuel. It would be irresponsible and unethical for us to lock ourselves into decades worth of further emissions through the construction of new large-scale and long-lived infrastructure.

While many of the details of climate change remain objects of scientific study, the core facts are clear and bolstered by multiple reinforcing lines of independent evidence. It cannot be denied that burning oil, gas, and coal adds to the level of carbon dioxide (CO₂) in the atmosphere. Further, it cannot be denied that the accumulation of greenhouse gases (GHGs) including CO₂ in the atmosphere causes the planet to warm. The GHGs we add by burning fossil fuels will largely persist in the air for thousands of years, shaping the lives of everyone who lives during those times. The choices we make in the next 15 years will determine if we cross the 2°C ‘dangerous’ threshold and risk imposing severe and intolerable harms and risks on future generations. These would likely include threatening many of the world’s major cities and entire low-lying countries with substantial sea level rise, as rising temperatures cause the world’s ice sheets to melt. Alongside this, changes in precipitation would likely produce challenges for global agriculture, human health impacts which have already been observed will worsen, the world ocean will continue to become more acidic, and extreme weather events will exact a larger price both financially and in terms of human suffering.

Canada cannot solve climate change alone. At the same time, the enormous size of our

fossil fuel reserves makes our decisions highly important. The same is true for our special relationship with the United States. We can either help to deepen America's troubling fossil fuel dependence, or we can play a part in shifting them to a more sustainable path. If we publicly accept that most of the planet's remaining fossil fuels cannot be burned without impoverishing the world and endangering future generations, and if we declare publicly that we are going to redirect our resources and abilities to the exploitation of climate-safe forms of energy, the world will surely take notice. Canada can go from playing an obstructionist role in blocking global efforts to deal effectively with climate change to being a leading voice in the drive toward a low-carbon future.

The economic temptation embedded in Canada's vast fossil fuel resources is certainly hard to resist, both for private companies and for governments. Particularly during times of relative economic difficulty, there is a strong temptation to support industries that seem to produce jobs and profits in the short term. Succumbing to these temptations in the case of fossil fuels would be deeply unwise. The world must engage collectively in the important project of phasing out of fossil fuels and replacing them with climate-safe forms of energy. On the basis of what we now know, building major new fossil fuel infrastructure is unethical in terms of its impact on future generations and financially unwise. This is because we will have sunk billions of dollars into infrastructure like oil pipelines that will need to be scrapped long before the end of its useful life, due to the overwhelming need to control climate change. We will then need to replace it quickly with appropriate energy infrastructure, paying a higher cost because of the need for haste. Finally, the whole world will suffer worse effects from climate change because of our choices.

Both the science and the moral case are strong. The obligation to act on them now falls upon all of us, and especially on those of us who are playing a major role in directing the future of Canada's economy and society. Canada can still change course, giving up on the dream of doubling and redoubling fossil fuel production, and shifting to the development and deployment of a modern energy infrastructure that can be relied upon forever and which is not a threat to our children and grandchildren, as well as to future generations around the world.

Thank you for your consideration,

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