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G20, Climate Change and Our Economy

Two events last weekend inspired this article.

Event number one was the G20 Summit in Toronto. Despite that most of the G20 media coverage focused on the security and protestors at the Summit, what concerns me more is Article 25 of the 27-page 'Declaration' that resulted from the Summit. In Article 25, the G20 countries committed to collectively increase funding by \$350 Billion dollars to developing nations for "lifting the lives of the poor, underwriting growth, and addressing climate change and food security."

I applaud the G20 for this commitment; the wealthy countries of the world should assist the poor. Particularly given that 20 percent of the world's population consumes 70 percent of its resources and holds 80 percent of its wealth. I assume that the commitment is proportional by G20 members, in other words, the U.S. commitment is ten times greater than Canada, meaning Canada's commitment may be one or two billion dollars. Spread that money over a few issues and it is apparent that Canada is committing a few million dollars to addressing climate change overseas. Good on us. Or is it?

Event number two was Al Gore's 'The Climate Project' international meeting held in Nashville last weekend. By way of background, a few Fredericton residents, including Carl Duivenvoorden and myself, were trained by Al Gore over the last few years to present a live version of his movie "An Inconvenient Truth". So as members of Gore's non-profit organization 'The Climate Project', we spent this past weekend with 700 other people from 26 countries who have worked with Al Gore to spread climate change information and solutions around the globe.

A number of world-renowned climate change experts participated in the event. At one point during the weekend Carl was asked to get on stage on address some points for the audience. He said this: "Who is leading the world in solar power development? China. Who is leading the world in smart grid technology? China. How can the United States guarantee energy security? The answer is: renewable energy (i.e. not from the Gulf of Mexico or the Middle East)". Succinct and well stated.

Our provincial and federal governments have a moral obligation to secure our future, two key components of that security is minimizing our impact on climate change while supporting economic growth (i.e. jobs).

It is evident that clean energy, such as wind, solar and geothermal will be the energy sources of the future. It is evident that the smart grid (picture the electricity grid morphing with the Internet) will play an active role in improving energy efficiency and reducing our dependence on fossil fuel based energy

sources. And it is evident that the countries of the world that take a leadership role in these areas will benefit economically.

So what is Canada doing? Our federal government has cut back funding on home energy efficiency audits, yet is pouring billions of dollars into carbon capture technology (burying carbon dioxide in the ground). These are billions of dollars that may or may not pay off, yet, and in the meantime, benefits the Albert economy, not ours in New Brunswick. At the same time, here we are as a nation only committing a few million dollars to climate change issues in developing nations who are being most hard hit by the devastating impacts of climate change.

It is about time that both the provincial and federal governments woke up and took real action today on supporting the economy and environment of the future. New Brunswick took a leadership role 20 years ago in the information technology (IT) industry. It was a visionary move and a wise investment, resulting in thousands of jobs over the last two decades and today. So now decades later, we must be visionary again when it comes to climate change, the green economy and renewable energy - the rhetoric has to stop and action has to start.

Forward thinking and action is needed today to guarantee jobs for Canadians and New Brunswickers in the next couple of decades. We cannot keep looking back at economies of yesterday for economic growth, we have to develop environmental and technological solutions for the next century in order to complete globally. If we don't, we may be the ones asking for aid in 50 years from those countries that did make the investment. I know that seems an unlikely prospect now, but unless we hook our economy to the right engine we will indeed be left behind. So now, this is our time to step out and once again be a leader.

Peter Corbyn is the Special Advisor to The Climate Project Canada and co-founder of GreenNexus.