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B.C. government's plan to construct three LNG plants counters CO2 reduction efforts

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Premier Christy Clark's pledges for job creation are neatly packaged in September's plan: "Canada Starts Here." But her proposed "start" sets a poor standard for British Columbia and Canada - breaking commitments to B.C.'s next generations under the guise of helping families today.

Premier Clark plans to construct three massive liquefied natural gas (LNG) plants in Northern B.C. This won't only create jobs. Extracting shale gas and operating these plants will release enough global warming gases to undo B.C.'s other efforts to cut emissions. Clark claims these plants are in the best interest of B.C.'s families.

However, the effects of climate change will deliver hardship to B.C. families in coming decades. The National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy concludes that climate change will inflict billions of dollars in economic losses on B.C. residents each year. These impacts include damages from coastal flooding, health costs from worsening air quality, and resource losses from deteriorating ecosystems and timber supply. Presumably, it was in the interest of B.C. families that the Liberal government already committed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions 33 per cent by 2020 and 80 per cent by 2050. And to the Liberal's credit, these targets are backed by bold and decisive policies. These include a ban on dirty coal-fired plants, a tax on greenhouse gas pollution, and regulations to improve building and vehicle efficiency.

But good intentions don't matter if Clark leads B.C.'s northern communities in the direction of Alberta's oilsands. A binge of resource extraction will only worsen environmental burdens on the next generations.

The sole purpose of liquefying B.C.'s natural gas is to feed the growing energy hunger of Japan, China, Taiwan and Korea. With continued depletion of B.C.'s most easily accessed natural gas reserves, Clark wants to meet Asia's demand with B.C.'s shale gas. Extracting shale gas is a much dirtier process that emits more greenhouse gases and harms local ecosystems and water supplies. Like Alberta's oilsands, shale gas development may produce some short-term economic gains while causing bigger problems for B.C.'s children and grandchildren.

The extraction and export of climate-warming fossil fuels is completely inconsistent with B.C.'s environmental commitments. Somehow, Clark reasons there is no problem in shipping B.C.'s

shale gas halfway around the world to be combusted elsewhere. Unfortunately, the atmosphere doesn't care where greenhouse gases are emitted - global warming accepts contributions from any country.

Further, the electricity demands of three enormous LNG plants will suck up most of BC Hydro's plans for added supply over the next decade. This includes Site C, expansions to the Revelstoke and Mica dams, and approved developments for wind, runoff-river hydro and other renewable energy projects. But these expansions are already earmarked to meet the growing electricity demand of B.C.'s families and businesses.

How should B.C. power these LNG plants? Large hydro projects are increasingly complicated - just look to Site C's controversy. Bulk imports from Alberta or the U.S. violate B.C.'s goals for electricity self-sufficiency. And natural gas or coal generation would further increase B.C.'s climate-warming emissions. Developing additional electricity supply will also inevitably drive up BC Hydro's electricity rates. Chalk up yet another financial hit to B.C.'s families.

Clark cannot responsibly move forward with this plan. B.C. needs to take responsibility for LNG emissions released after export to foreign countries. These added emissions would certainly sabotage efforts to meet 2020 emissions targets. Further, the costs of responsibly eliminating emissions from extracting and liquefying shale gas will make export unprofitable.

Clark promised that her LNG plans will benefit B.C. families without "changing environmental protections." But the numbers don't add up. Clark has two options. The responsible choice is to cancel the development of LNG plants - in the name of B.C. families and their next generations. Or she can confess to breaking B.C.'s commitments to the next generations in the interest of job creation for short-term benefit and political popularity.

Families throughout B.C. and Canada want good jobs and strong economies. But surely B.C. can develop plans for prosperity that don't pass the buck to B.C.'s next generations. If Canada is supposed to "start here," make sure it's a start that our grandchildren can live with.

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