

Businesses band together for consistent climate policy

by Kimberly Greene 12 Feb 2020



Last year, business leaders from across the country were engaged in conversations about the possibility of creating a national coalition focused solely on fighting climate change. That coalition has now become a reality with the impending launch of the [Canadian Business for Climate Policy](#).

The climate discussion worldwide is fragmented, and this holds true for the Canadian business community as well. Some businesses are leaders, other voices are less inclined to take a leadership role. For senior business executive David McGown, enough was enough.

“It’s now time for the business community to stand up and actually have a consistent business voice for consistent climate policy,” he said. “2020 is the year where we can actually perhaps stop talking about what should we be doing on the climate file and start acting, and so the overwhelming response has been it’s the right time, it’s the right idea, and it’s absolutely the right approach. The response has been overwhelmingly positive.”

The building sector has been an important leader in this sphere, McGown said, but part of the challenge is that while there is forward momentum within sectors, the consistent business voice for consistent policy has been lacking. This year, the hope is to weave some of the good work of individual industries together and to effect Canadian climate policy overall.

The objective of the Canadian Business for Climate Policy is to advocate for three things: climate policy that's consistent, which requires governments to establish policies that can withstand an election cycle; climate policy that's effective, which takes Canada toward its domestic and international climate commitments; and climate policy that's efficient, which means that the costs are spread equitably across the economy.

McGown was approached by the Ivey Foundation, which focuses its resources on their Economy and Environment program, supporting objectives and missions to create a "compelling, credible vision for a sustainable low carbon economy." In 2019, the foundation challenged the business community to step up and establish a strong voice on climate policy, McGown said, and over the course of the year, he worked with a number of partners to see if there existed enough value and desire to establish a new organization that would bring a business voice to the climate table.

While this was happening, **Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario (RCCAO) Chair Phil Rubinoff** had an idea to form an organization that was focused on grandparents [concerned about climate risk](#) for future generations. He mentioned his idea to **RCCAO Executive Director Andy Manahan**, who discovered there were similar organizations. The two were soon put in touch with David McGown, who was already deep into developing a group of like-minded leaders across various industries.

"We shifted gears and decided, let's do something a bit larger," Manahan said.

Leadership at RCCAO was getting frustrated with the proliferation of climate-deniers and people with a platform who were criticizing others who were more vocal about climate change. A lot of propositions were short-sighted, and the partisan politics were "really distressing" overall.

"We were getting frustrated by this debate becoming political," Manahan said. "We thought, this is crazy. Politicians should be leading the charge on this."

As the climate change conversation was ramping up, leaders at the **Residential Construction Council of Ontario (RESCON)** found that they were having to deal with headaches due to different levels of government creating ideas around climate policy that didn't make sense, weren't cost effective, and weren't effective overall.

[RESCON President Richard Lyall](#) said that the most effective approach regarding climate change requires a set of stable policies for industry. Investment is the fuel for the engines of industry, and investment is connected to risk. In an uncertain environment where no one knows where the goalposts are with climate policy, it's a big problem.

“What we need is a set of national standards on how we’re going to approach this. It’s not just construction, it’s really got to be industry in general,” Lyall said. “We need to get together and we need to have a voice with government and to government on what we think is needed.”

Lyall isn’t alone. Over many conversations McGown has had with business leaders, a common theme is that the lack of consistency on climate policy is actually a business risk.

“Implicit in a lot of commentary around climate policy is that it’s going to be bad for business, and I think quite the opposite; the lack of consistent climate policy is bad for business,” McGown said.

There’s no shortage of climate-focused organizations, and McGown took great care to ensure that there wasn’t another advocacy voice in Canada focused on the same goals. He also took care to ensure that the coalition was a collaborative effort. Rather than approaching this project like a new business organization, the coalition was established more as a foundation for a five-year business campaign.

“I think there’s a real role in the business community in helping to change the conversation of climate policy in Canada, I think there’s a real role in the business community in creating greater consensus for the need for effective climate policy in Canada, and I think we’ve got a five-year window to achieve that—and I think that’s entirely possible.”

Lyall said that the granular specifics will come, but everyone needs to move forward with “sensible, common standards across the board that industry understands, that are predictable, and we need the different levels of government to be on the same page.”

Manahan agrees that it’s difficult to move forward in one direction when different leaders come into and out of the picture with their own agendas. Everyone is focused on the short-term accomplishments without really investing in long-term outcomes.

“We need some more consistency in how politicians treat this, and if we do have those rules of the road, then business can plan and they can do innovative things,” Manahan said.

McGown is an economist by training. He was inspired by former politician Jim Prentice, and was part of a group of people who worked with him on the interplay of natural resource development, the environment, and the role of indigenous voices in that conversation. While McGown says that the impact won’t be immediate for the housing market, uncertainty gets in the way of business confidence, and that has a knock-on effect.

“Business confidence leads to jobs, leads to consumer confidence and housing growth. It’s the broad economic brush that hopefully brings stronger domestic economic growth,” McGown said.

Current members of the Canadian Business for Climate Policy include RESCON, RCCAO, among others.