

# CANADA SHOULD TAKE PAGE OUT OF SOUTH KOREA'S GREEN PLAYBOOK

*Posted on January 25, 2010 by Keghart*

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✖ By Keith Stewart, [The Toronto Star](#), 4 February 2010



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We got a taste of this last month, when the Ontario government announced a major investment by a group of Korean companies in wind and solar power manufacturing operations.

The provincial government expects that this \$7 billion investment will create 16,000 jobs over the next six years while helping to phase out our highly polluting coal plants. But some observers were asking why Ontario would have to look to Korean firms for this type of investment.

The answer lies in the fact that while our federal government has been banking on the oil industry as the engine of the Canadian economy, South Korea has launched a "Green New Deal" that aims to create 960,000 new jobs while reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

In other words, those 16,000 jobs that are so welcome in Ontario are merely the appetizers rolling off a much bigger banquet table being set by South Korea and other countries building their capacity to manufacture and deploy clean energy technology.

In many ways, South Korea and Canada aren't so far apart.

We have similarly sized economies, coming in 13th and 14th respectively on the list of the largest

economies in the world. We are both in the top 10 of global carbon polluters, although Canada emits about 15 per cent more greenhouse gas with only two-thirds the population of South Korea.

Yet, when it comes to a recent ranking of clean energy technology sales as a share of the overall national economy, South Korea came in ninth in the world while Canada ranked a distant 31st.

And that gap is growing.

In responding to the global financial crisis, South Korea led the world in terms of the proportion going toward improving environmental performance.

South Korea invested more than \$30 billion, or an incredible 80 per cent, of its economic stimulus package in green projects, with the largest chunks going for investments in improving energy efficiency in buildings, expanding mass transit and railroads, and restoring rivers and forests.

In Canada, by comparison, only 8 per cent of our stimulus package was classified as green, with the bulk of that 8 per cent dedicated to public subsidies for carbon capture and storage projects that disproportionately benefit oil companies and coal-fired power generators.

While South Korea is leading the way, we're falling behind many other countries as well: total green spending in China and the United States made up 38 per cent and 12 per cent respectively of their stimulus packages.

These facts, along with the Canadian government's lack of leadership on climate change, have led many of my international colleagues to hope that South Korea will take the lead at the G20 meeting.

Yet, like most Canadians, I'm not ready to abandon the possibility of turning this around.

Yes, we have some catching up to do, and not least in getting past the old-school thinking that sees environment and economy as opposing principles to be traded off against one another or as a luxury to be pursued only in good times.

But we are already seeing good, green jobs being created from the push to phase out coal, based on policies to boost renewable energy that the Ontario government borrowed from the Germans.

So why not take advantage of the preparations for the G20 meeting to lift a page or two from the Korean playbook on building a national strategy for making the transition to a low-carbon economy?

I don't think anyone will mind, when the result is a healthy economy and a safe environment for our kids, and theirs.

*Keith Stewart is climate change program director for WWF-Canada.*

