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## UNESCO Chair at Laurier leads task force focused on creating a more sustainable post-pandemic society

WATERLOO – As Canada begins to lift COVID-19 lockdown measures, how can all levels of government use infrastructure investments to create a greener, more resilient and sustainable country? That is a key question being addressed by the Building Back Better: Post COVID-19 Task Force, established by the [Canadian Commission for UNESCO \(CCUNESCO\)](#) and led by [Allison Blay-Palmer](#), a professor at Wilfrid Laurier University and the [UNESCO Chair on Food, Biodiversity and Sustainability Studies](#).

The Building Back Better task force, composed of 13 scholars from Ontario universities and Sébastien Goupil, secretary-general of CCUNESCO, recently [published a position paper](#) on iPolitics.ca, the first in a series that will include three policy briefs with related policy notes. The initial position paper identifies five key pillars to guide post-COVID-19 infrastructure spending: strengthened and cooperative governance; inclusion of Indigenous pathways; protection and restoration of ecosystems and biodiversity; sustainable food systems; and green infrastructure.

"As we rebuild our communities and economies, we have a unique opportunity to sculpt a future that is proactively green, economically robust and inclusive," said Blay-Palmer, a professor of Geography and Environmental Studies who also serves as director of the Laurier Centre for Sustainable Food Systems (LCSFS). "This pandemic has thrown into stark relief the precarity of economies built on fossil fuels. This is an unprecedented moment and it creates entry points to accelerate long-term change through short-term spending."

Blay-Palmer and Goupil [published an op-ed](#) in May outlining the priorities of the Building Back Better task force. In their upcoming policy briefs, which will be published on iPolitics.ca every Wednesday for the next three weeks, the task force will provide specific policy considerations for municipal, provincial and federal governments on the topics of green infrastructure, regenerative food systems, and the restoration of ecosystems and biodiversity. Blay-Palmer and her colleagues point to the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as a roadmap for success.

"To build a better future for all, we need to reconsider how to eliminate poverty, reduce inequalities, advance environmental stewardship and build more sustainable cities," said Goupil. "The 17 Sustainable Development Goals remind us that economic, social and technological progress can all be achieved in harmony with nature. We also need to rediscover the benefits of circular economic systems, so everyone's basic needs can be met without depleting our planet's finite resources."

In addition to Blay-Palmer, five Laurier faculty and staff members are represented on the Building Back Better task force: Simon Dalby, professor of Geography and Environmental Studies; Amanda Di Battista, project coordinator, LCSFS; Heather Reid, research assistant, LCSFS; Wayne Roberts, advisor, LCSFS; and Debora Van Nijnatten, professor of Political Science and North American Studies. They are joined by sustainability experts from the Balsillie School of International Affairs, the University of Toronto, Brock University, Carleton University, Simon Fraser University and the University of Ottawa.

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Inter-university co-operation is a hallmark of the prestigious UNESCO Chairs program, which [Blay-Palmer was appointed to in December 2019](#).

"This task force represents an extremely fruitful multi-institutional collaboration to imagine a more resilient post-COVID-19 future," said Blay-Palmer.

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