

Resolve This Mess

Nationalpost.com
November 24th, 2018
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It is past time to reverse the current in Canada's energy debate. Give the economy and Canadian workers priority over green warriors.

Lewis Carroll is alive and well, and writing Canada's energy policy.

I am willing to offer the dead but gifted master of the absurd the credit, mainly because I think it would be cruel to ascribe it to living intelligences. However — that gesture of mercy aside — reality sees it otherwise, and we know it is the masterminds of the PMO who have brought the energy policy of our country to the total and possibly irredeemable mess that it now so very emphatically is.

Even so, the combination of regulations and procrastination, surreal taxation, endless court battles, and insensate opposition by brigades of wild-eyed foundations and NGOs can be said to constitute a “policy” only in the way that tumbling off a precipice to splatter on the rocks below might be described as “finding a neat shortcut to the valley.”

The highlight of my news week was a story out of the East Coast, wherein I learned that in a cull of superfluous moose, the federal department was paying out the tidy sum of \$7,900 a head. And that in a week when one grade of Canadian oil was racking up the heady purchase price of \$7.50 a barrel. Now I love moose as much as the next hominid (especially when packaged as sausages) but an economy that supports \$8,000 mooses, and a barrel of oil at 1/1000th the cost, is not perfectly secure. (Perhaps I should be careful in associating these two topics. For if the animal rights crowd and the green furies were to band together, there would be

such a stampede of sanctimony as to blot out the sun and hurl the lesser planets from their natural orbits.)

Elsewhere, we hear from Premier Notley of her province forgoing \$80 million a day because Alberta oil, weathering the worse downturn in a decade, and after the calamitous fire in Fort McMurray, is being held hostage, in an economic chokehold, by the lack of any outward access to world markets. Companies and capital have been in full flight from the province, thousands of workers displaced and unemployed, and less real government attention is being paid to a province in full crisis than to the now ritual apology-of-the-week from the leadership in Ottawa.

It is past time to reverse the onus of the policy debate on Canada's energy industry.

Until there are pipelines (plural) built and oil flowing to international markets there should be no talk of the so-call carbon tax — the energy tax. Until the crazed circumstance of the blockade on Alberta energy is resolved, all talk of “reducing carbon emissions” and the pretence of meeting our Paris “commitments” should be shelved. Fix the home front first, and then if some wish to attend to the dubious goals of planetary salvation, let them at it.

Secondly, reverse the onus on jobs and development. Why do those who offer development, technology and jobs have to stagger through years of hearings, assessments, protests, court cases and appeals, to get permission to supply a basket of incontestable benefits?

Considering the egregious state of the Canadian energy industry, the farce/folly of the price differentials for Canadian oil versus U.S. or world prices, the notion that

it is the energy industry and those who work in it, who have to make the concessions, bow to the spaghetti tangle of regulations, is plainly ludicrous.

How ludicrous? Well, one company spent seven years in the assessment marshlands trying to twin a pipeline, with its own money, and finally, exhausted, said enough. That's the story of Trans Mountain — which the Liberal government then had to buy to save political face, and assume responsibility for what the private sector was eager to do originally. The proposed pipeline, of course, is still stalled. The story of Trans Mountain is the sad parable of the whole industry.



A protester holds a photo of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau during a Vancouver protest against the Kinder Morgan Trans Mountain Pipeline expansion on May 29, 2018. *Darryl Dyck/CP*

I think we must “reverse the current” in this discussion. Let the burden of assessment fall to the oppositional voices. Why shouldn't this be built? Why should we not start a project that will employ thousands of Canadians? Why do they not support Aboriginal groups who have signed on to projects? If there are protesters, ask: What are they offering? What are protesters bringing to the table that merits giving them standing with the principals?

There should be an audit on the “downstream emissions” of environmental protest.
It would include:

Billions of dollars in revenues lost from projects that were halted.

Tens of thousands of jobs that never materialized.

Towns that will languish from unemployment.

Capital investments that will fail to come to Canada because of the hostility to enterprise generated by irresponsible protest.

And most significantly, a single instance of a global industry — Alberta oil and gas — being made the villain of an entire global campaign.



A cardboard cut-out of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau is seen outside the Canadian embassy in London, England, where anti-pipeline protesters blocked the entrance with a fake pipeline on April 18, 2018. *Tolga Akmen//AFP/Getty Images*

Thirdly, it is time for Alberta to play hardball on this file. Niceness is a great thing, and I agree it is something of a genuine Canadian virtue. But niceness, the spirit of compromise, the efforts to buy “social licence,” have all come to nothing. The oil is still under blockade, a cardinal element of the Canadian economy is being held hostage, revenues in the billions of dollars are being lost to the treasuries of Alberta and Ottawa, and the international reputation of Canadian business is in tatters.

To end, there should be a new equation: No carbon taxes anywhere till Canada sees new pipelines and oil flowing at sane prices to international markets.

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