



Opposition Leader Tom Mulcair writes that “It’s time to start enforcing the basic rules of sustainable development, including polluter-pay.” NDP photo

A New Vision for Canada’s Energy Future

Tom Mulcair

Canada stands at a crossroads both in terms of our energy future and how we negotiate that future among governments, business and communities, particularly First Nations. The challenge for Ottawa in the years to come will be how to demonstrate leadership, embrace a long-term vision and work with the provinces and First Nations so that resource development serves Canadians, and not the other way around. Unfortunately, the Harper Conservatives are taking Canada in the opposite direction.

Canada’s natural resources are a tremendous blessing. Today, they are driving our economy in ways that were unimaginable just a generation ago. But with the incredible growth of our energy sector also come significant challenges for the future if we are to ensure that all Canadians draw maximum benefit from our resources.

We stand on the edge of a new energy world, one where a strict reliance on conventional, non-renewable energy sources is increasingly disadvantageous from an environmental and energy security perspective. We are

also at a crossroads when it comes to aboriginal involvement in development: the recent Supreme Court decision in favour of the Tsilhqot'in and Xenigwet'in nations has driven home the fact that resource development will simply not happen without proper First Nations consultation and accommodation.

There is a compelling need for a pan-Canadian approach to energy that is rooted in a vision of maximizing benefit not just for the immediate future, but for future generations as well. Canada needs resource prosperity to last, environmental protection to become a vital part of all projects, and for development to be done in a way that involves communities rather than alienating them.

This is the shape of the challenge facing the federal government in the coming years—how to demonstrate leadership and work with the provinces and First Nations so that resource development serves Canadians, and not the other way around.

Unfortunately, the Harper Conservatives are taking Canada in the opposite direction with their refusal to ensure that polluters pay for the pollution they create, their systematic attacks on environmental protection, and their abject failure to partner with First Nations.

A great lesson of the 20th century is the need to consider intergenerational environmental impacts of development projects. In my speech to the Economic Club of Canada last December, I spoke about one striking example of what happens when governments pit jobs against the environment—the case of Giant Mine at Great Slave Lake.

This mine, situated next to the deepest freshwater lake in North America, was one of the richest gold mines in Canada. It also released more than 237,000 tonnes of arsenic trioxide waste in its 50 years of operation, with little regard for what cost that would impose on future generations. Today, the clean-up bill for Giant Mine's waste has doubled from initial estimates to nearly a billion dollars—all of which will be paid for by taxpayers.

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Put simply, a legacy of reckless environmental debt bequeaths future generations the clean-up bill for today's projects, rather than ensuring that the companies that produce pollution foot the bill. This puts our future economic prosperity at risk, mortgaging the wealth of future generations for a quick buck today. Last year, Stephen Harper visited the site of the Giant Mine and lamented the fact that our generation was stuck with the clean-up bill. The irony is that his development motto is "live for today and let tomorrow take care of itself." We can be forgiving of past generations who left us these messes all across our resource-bearing regions: that was just the way mining was done at the time. No one will forgive us. We know better. It's time to start enforcing basic rules of sustainable development, like polluter-pay.

There are important steps the federal government can take to prevent massive environmental legacy costs like those of Giant Mine. But instead of building strong, world-class environmental protection standards, the Conservatives have gone out of their way to weaken environmental reviews and gut the laws that are the cornerstone of environmental protection in natural resource development.

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From removing thousands of rivers and lakes from protection under the Navigable Waters Act, to a wholesale

rewrite of the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act designed solely to short-circuit credible project reviews, their legislative changes have systematically undermined some of the oldest tools for environmental protection in Canada. These changes have also gutted the federal infrastructure for community consultation—which breeds opposition to projects communities increasingly feel are being imposed on them. In short, the public wants an objective environmental review process in all cases, and the Conservatives want an environmental approval process in all cases.

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Aboriginal consultation, accommodation and participation in resource projects is another area that has suffered tremendously under successive federal governments. Rather than reaching out to engage First Nations as partners in development, and to ensure that benefits accrue to the First Nations communities that are often the most directly impacted by development, the Conservative government has completely dropped the ball.

Instead of rising to meet the complex challenge of ensuring that resource development happens in partnership with First Nations, the Harper government has disregarded the concerns and input of First Nations communities—even against the advice of their own appointees.

The government's own special envoy on aboriginal and energy issues, Douglas Eyford, has repeatedly warned that projects are failing largely because industry has been left alone to navigate consultation and

accommodation of First Nations concerns. More than nine months after his final report was tabled, little has changed—and the recent Supreme Court decision in favour of the Tsilhqot'in and Xeni Gwet'in Nations with respect to logging has made it even clearer that ignoring aboriginal title is unacceptable.

Finally, the Conservatives' record of inaction on climate change and the environmental impacts of oil sands development presents a significant challenge for industry. Other countries have taken note of the Conservative government's intransigence on climate action, and it has served to sour Canada's international and trade reputation. One needs to look no further than the proposal for a Fuel Quality Directive in Europe, or the forceful opposition to Keystone XL in the United States, to see how failure to protect our environment has direct impacts on our ability to access global markets. Even the International Monetary Fund has said that Canada can do more to internalize the price of carbon and still improve the economy.

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It's clear that Canada can, and must, do better. Business leaders understand the urgency of meeting these challenges head on—in fact, while many may have initially welcomed the Conservative push for de-regulation, most now see it for the poisoned chalice it is. You can indeed guarantee a regulatory licence faster if you gut environmental laws. However, without a social licence, any major project will actually have more difficulty moving forward.

If Canada is to be a model of successful and sustainable resource development, rather than backing away from its responsibilities, the federal government needs to play an active

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role in working with the provinces to meet our environmental obligations and ensure that all Canadians benefit from resource development.

This begins by establishing a thorough, credible and efficient system of environmental assessments for resource development projects. It is imperative that our processes build in the time it takes to get development right, to consult with communities, to listen to and accommodate First Nations and to evaluate the scientific evidence about potential project impacts. A quality environmental review process is imperative both for improving projects that do go ahead, and for assuring our trade partners that we are developing our resources sustainably. This is not simply the right thing to do; it is also good for business—providing certainty and the ability for companies to plan around well-established process, instead of a regime that changes at the government's whim.

In addition to establishing a credible environmental review process, the federal government must ensure that First Nations become equal partners in resource development. A critical step in this process is the resolution of outstanding land claims and treaty disputes, an issue too long neglected by successive federal governments. This means adopting a nation-to-nation relationship with First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples in Canada, and ensuring that they are consulted prior to, and benefit from, any projects that impact them and their traditional lands. The ability to build and sustain this kind of respectful relationship is a critical question of political will that could well determine Canada's energy future.

Other Canadian communities also need to see direct benefits from resource development. In addition to meaningful local consultation and ensuring the highest standards of safety and environmental protec-

tion, the federal government needs to support value-added jobs right here in Canada. We should be working with the provinces to upgrade and refine our resources at home, rather than shipping these jobs out of the country with our raw resources. The Keystone XL pipeline is a case in point—40,000 potential jobs will go south along with raw bitumen if the project is approved. This is not in Canada's long term interest. Instead, the federal government should focus on supporting local jobs and prosperity for the long term.

Crucially, we need real accounting for the environmental impacts of resource development. This includes a price on carbon and taking an active role in shouldering our fair share of global greenhouse gas emissions reductions. Canada must also take steps to reduce the demand for energy, through energy efficiency retrofits for homes. The Conservatives ended a sensible and successful program that saved Canadians money and reduced energy use.

Canada also has to step into the global clean energy market. We have the potential to become a leader in this sector, which is expected to be worth an astonishing \$3-trillion a year by 2020, thanks to our skilled workforce, advanced economy and vast natural resource wealth. What's missing is decisive direction from the federal government that would send signals to the market to stimulate investment in clean tech, such as cancelling perverse fossil fuel subsidies and investing in renewable energy.

In sum, with the right vision and the policies to back it up, Canadians can be the ones who benefit the most from our resources not just today, but for generations to come. The time to change our approach is now—and all that we are missing in Canada to get it done is political will. **P**

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