



Opinion: The 'just transition' will have catastrophic effects for First Nation people

Opinion by Dale Swampy • Friday, March 17, 2023

If the federal government continues on its path with a “just transition,” an emissions cap and other crippling legislation, we will enter an energy crisis that will have catastrophic effects on our people, especially those living on reserves across this country.



Dignitaries gather after Enbridge and 23 First Nations and Metis communities signed the largest Indigenous energy investment in Canadian history in September 2022. © Provided by Calgary Herald

First Nations communities have been left out of Canada’s wealth and prosperity for centuries. The National Coalition of Chiefs (NCC) is working toward improving our participation and inclusion in Canada’s economy through partnerships with Canada’s largest industry, the natural resource industry.

We believe that Canada’s oil and gas industry is the most technologically advanced industry in the world and should be applauded, not demonized as the federal government is doing now with its crippling legislation.

Canada leads the world in environmental protection and advancements in clean energy technology. The NCC supports the numerous renewable projects being

developed in Alberta — more than all other provinces combined. We also support Canada's new state-of-the-art LNG export terminals in northwestern B.C., precious metals mining projects in Ontario, uranium mining in Saskatchewan and the Pathways Alliance Project — all working toward the clean energy transition.

The world is starving for Canadian oil and gas. The emissions produced in the production cycle are the lowest on the planet and are getting increasingly better as we speak. Our federal government risks killing off our industry while India and the rest of Asia move away from natural gas and build more coal power plants.

Like Canada's oil and gas industry, First Nations communities want to be part of this transition. Our communities are working with LNG Canada and TC Energy to build one of the largest LNG ports in the world. We are working with other oil and gas companies to develop the First Nations-led Wood Fibre LNG project and Cedar LNG. We are working with the six largest oilsands companies to develop the Pathways Alliance project that plans to create one of the largest CCUS projects in the world. All of these projects, when completed, will significantly reduce Canada's emissions and help us meet targets for 2030 and 2050.

Canada's oil and gas industry is unique. There is no country in the world that comes close to what our oil and gas industry has accomplished; and through new ESG guidelines, Indigenous inclusion in major oil and gas developments has become a priority in achieving social acceptance.

Our First Nations communities are working hard to support Canada's oil and gas industry. We are working hard to ensure that the new UNDRIP legislation ensures that the industry has a fair regulatory regime that clearly defines what constitutes adequate First Nations engagement and consultation; which communities are affected by project development and operations; and what Indigenous inclusion means as it relates to First Nations employment, community investment, contracting and equity ownership.

Without First Nations involvement in the clean energy transition and without full inclusion of our oil and gas industry, any legislation, policy or long-term planning will fail. We all know, but are afraid to acknowledge, that the need for oil and gas

will continue to rise and the use of oil- and gas-generated power systems around the world will continue for decades to come. Unless we understand and appreciate this reality, we are going to fall ever deeper into an energy crisis that will affect every Canadian. It is going to create unmanageably high utility costs that will adversely affect the impoverished, which means that many living on reserves will suffer the most.

Let's move toward a more sustainable energy transition. Let's not put the cart before the horse by destroying an industry without first having an adequate and sustainable clean energy industry to replace it.

Dale Swampy is a member of the Samson Cree Nation and president of the National Coalition of Chiefs.