

ISSUES & IDEAS

Stand up, O Canada

We must not allow the U.S. to meddle in our internal affairs, including pipeline discussions



ADAM LEAMY AND JAMIE LAMB

Welcome to the renewed Canada.

It started with our recognition that made-in-Canada economic policies allowed us to escape the ruin that has hammered our U.S. neighbour. Lately, it's been the Canadians in London with their remarkable abilities and their new confidence to say that if there's a podium, Canada should be on it. For each of us, for our country, and our future, grand things happen when Canada stands up.

We believe in the power and potential of this renewed Canada. It's a country where, through our own choices and efforts and the confidence and determination to stick with them, we find our own way to our own destination.

Which brings us to the sad state of our U.S. neighbour. The U.S. has this innate need to see its interests furthered. It's the flip side of America's persistence in claiming that it represents hard work and enterprise — it meddles and cavorts and always, always, always sees to it that its interests are addressed. Take the Enbridge pipeline — what's happening on that front is entirely to the liking of U.S. interests.

We know it's never over when we sign trade deals with America. Ask yourself, is there a single agreement with Canada that the Americans have not assaulted or trampled? The Canada-U.S. Softwood Lumber Agreement, with which all Canadians are familiar, is not so much an agreement as it is a means through which American interests erect all manner of contrived barriers against Canada. Seriously, has there even been a single day when American interests allowed the treaty to work as signed? Sad, but true, the U.S. is a trade-deal welcher. So when we talk about the fact that is the Enbridge pipeline proposal, we know this: When our U.S. neighbour needs oil and energy it goes to remarkable lengths to procure not only its access to it, but its privileged access to it. U.S. Middle East policy is built on this kind of access. Recall America's two very serious exercises in self-interest in Kuwait. But after America's own domestic production, it's Canada that is the largest supplier of oil to America. It's not easy to get Canadian oil to other markets, so the U.S. enjoys privileged access to our product at a deeply discounted price.

Pipeline a Trojan horse

After the 2008 recession, with the U.S. trying to coax its same flawed policies to somehow cough out good outcomes, it seemed a wise time for Canada to diversify its customer base for oil, as we did with lumber. We've learned hard lessons about putting our golden eggs in such an unreliable, unreliable basket. We started thinking about our reserves and types of oil production. If the only market right now for most of our oil is America, and at a deeply discounted price, and we could sell our bounty to other markets — Asia in general, China specifically — we could secure market prices. The most direct path to this diversification would be a northern east-west pipeline through British Columbia.

Then, all hell broke loose. Before we could participate in the discussion about Canada's economic future and the role of oil diversification in it, there was pandemonium.

It's not that Canadians aren't capable of having the discussion on oil diversification and the route to it. The problem is the U.S. What's at stake for the U.S. in any discussion by Canadians on oil diversification is the potential for an end to its discount rate for oil and for other countries to dip their ladies into what the U.S. considers its "reserve stock" Canadian supply, and that cannot be allowed to happen.

So, Enbridge puts out a plan for a pipeline covering such a dangerous route linking it to such perilous waters you'd think it had been put together by someone holding a stick, wearing a blindfold, using a Ouija board to find a tree from which there might be hanging a cynic to hold it. You have to wonder if Enbridge ever wanted the thing to advance in the first place. Maybe it didn't.

The company ignores B.C.'s first nations, setting that clock back 30 years.



The Americans had designs on controlling Canadian decision-making in 1812, depicted in this re-enactment in London, Ont. Two hundred years later, we are facing similar issues with Enbridge's Northern Gateway pipeline proposal.

If we were Americans looking to make sure Canada had no other market for its oil than ours, and maybe even at a greater discount than we're getting now, we'd be high-fiving ourselves for the easy-button destabilization campaign so successfully launched against Canada.

First nations, tired of all the talk on corporate partnering on projects that wind up being one-sided and run by partners who don't listen, get a chance to stand up and say no to something that looks, feels, and smells so wrong.

In this digital age, when views and opinions about people and places are crafted in an instant, the B.C. government offers Canada a dead-wrong view of British Columbians' commitment to the environment. The B.C. government's list of pipeline demands says this: British Columbians value the environment and want to protect it. Unless the right money comes along, in which case it's to hell with the environment, hello cash wad.

The B.C. premier is at war with Alberta's premier. The Alberta premier believes the B.C. premier to be Alberta's public enemy No. 1. Other premiers are picking sides or placing bets. And no wonder — all manner of "Canadian" groups bankrolled from south of the border are honouring their funders, directing and controlling discussions that should be left to Canadians, and in no small way goading some of our leaders into behaviour so crass, you'd think it was U.S. reality TV.

U.S. wants to destabilize us

At one point, incredibly, these same policy leaders and their advisers were publicly musing if the pipeline issue meant that Canadian federalism was dead, ready for the trash bin. The vain behaviour of the premiers egged on by the advice of their cynical, old-world, used-to-be-someone advisers would make you think Canada's strength can be eroded simply by introducing a policy discussion, and so disconnected are we that people in one part

of Canada don't give a damn about people in another part of Canada.

All this because of a pipeline. Honestly? If we were Americans looking to make sure Canada had no other market for its oil than ours, and maybe even at a greater discount than we're getting now, we'd be high-fiving ourselves for the easy-button destabilization campaign so successfully launched against Canada.

Canadians should be seething that we've let others choreograph this disgrace.

Again, why are we at this point? If you hear hoof beats — well, you know Occam's Razor — it's the U.S. addition to our discounted oil, and its determination that the supply and price will never be in question, no matter Canada's ideas about market diversification and its role in securing our economic future. Disarray and division in Canada? No better way to preserve American oil interests here.

Americans should butt out

So, in the name of those Canadians, and those wondering — perhaps regretting, now — how they got caught up in such a dogfight so fast, and wish there were a way out, we say, enough. Let's set aside all the catervauling and hair pulling on the public stage. We know what's been going on. It's time for a fresh start.

We've been trained over the years, particularly here on the coast, not to accept a prime minister's view as gospel, but in this instance, the prime minister has it dead right: We Canadians must secure our economic freedom. We must diversify the markets that want our goods in pursuit of that economic goal, especially if failure to do so puts our future at the mercy and whims of a single market. The destination is true, and the route to it, naturally, requires a discussion — one that is Canadians' sole right to have. Among ourselves. It's our family time, so time for outsiders to go home.

And that means those from outside Canada manipulating and hijacking the policy conversations and public discourse that rightly belong to Canadians need to be belled. The back-door funding of Canadian advocacy groups from the U.S. — advancing the views of God-knows-what U.S. policy cranks and wonky interests — needs to be stopped through aggressive tax policy applied to these "Canadian" organizations. These U.S. backrollers need

to hear that this is our conversation, and they're not welcome in it. They'll just have to abide by our decision. No apologies from us — that's the old Canada. This is the renewed Canada speaking — there's the door.

Enbridge executives who fronted such a flawed plan also need to be shown the door, and fast, before their actions — whether by pure incompetence or some clever America-first, America-always agenda from their U.S.-dominated board — fix it so the idea of a pipeline, any pipeline, is so discredited here, we'll be celebrating the 100th anniversary of a fixed link between Vancouver Island and the Mainland before we ever again raise the pipeline issue.

Let's all of us Canadians settle down a little on this issue. We've been manipulated through the wringer, and we need to pause, shift gears, and remember who we are and all that is good that unites us. And from that, Enbridge and its Mad-Men ways need to take our lead; no more spending scads of dough in our movie theatres and our newspapers to tell us why they're a great company, why the pipeline is the best thing since toaster strudel, and why the oilpatch knows what's best for Canada and its coasts. Really, Enbridge, enough guff already.

And for the next leaders from Enbridge with a better plan, or from another company with a superior plan, use the quiet time to have a wath of the War of 1812 commercial being aired by the Government of Canada. Take special note of where Isaac Brock turns and nods to Tecumseh, who in doing the same, acknowledges the bond. See how Charles de Salaberry is also in the picture? As important, make sure you understand the role of Laura Secord, who put Canada on to the U.S. plans and whose efforts helped secure American surrender. Note how all these individuals and those whom they had the privilege to lead worked together to produce Canada's greatest victory, the one that secured our future, way back then.

A strong local presence is part of any pipeline future on this or any of our coasts. There are enough other companies headquartered in the oilpatch. A responsible pipeline company needs to be on the ground, headquartered near Canada's West Coast shoreline to attend to that equally important national asset.

Address Canadians' environmental concerns, for there isn't a Canadian

of any political or social stripe who wants to see a pipeline leak so much as a capital of oil.

United, we'll never be divided

One more thing. Look at how Canadians faced risk, danger and adversity and along the way, through common sense, sensitivity, and uncommon courage, built this province and this country. Some of the voices in the choreographed pipeline debate make us out to be bereft of spine and drive, scared to identify risk, assess it, and move forward. That wasn't the old Canada, and it sure isn't the renewed Canada. Suggest we're not up to the tough land we've made our home, and watch us stand up and brush you aside.

Canadians are remarkably effective when we understand a situation and choose to stand up and act together. We are not our own foe. So, let us have our own time for our own pipeline discussion, by all means offer up that pipeline routing and destination, and through it all, show respect for our first nations and their traditional territory.

But mess with us any more, or undermine our rights as Canadians to secure our own economic future, and you'll find we're of a mind to route and build the bloody thing ourselves. After all, given U.S. achievement in building its fine land, who better than Canadians, really, to build ours?

We believe in the renewed Canada.

We know that in 1812, the Americans physically came to Canada with plans to take over our decision making, and make our future their future. This pipeline mess of 2012 shows us that through the Internet, and the anonymous electronic transfer of cash and agendas that it allows, Americans are up to their same old tricks, but without all the bother of the guns and travel.

Stand up, Canada. In showing the same strength and unity of purpose now that we demonstrated 200 years ago, we'll secure our new future while, ironically, once again putting the Americans at bay. Two hundred years since we sent them packing, America is still our neighbour. It just isn't our friend. It still wants its own way, and that still means getting its way with us.

So stand up, Canada. Good things always happen when we do.

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COMMENTARY

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