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**THE GLOBE AND MAIL** 

## Ditch 'immature rhetoric' on oil sands, David Suzuki tells Tory senators

[gloria galloway](#)

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One of Canada's leading environmental groups is urging Canadians to tell Conservative senators to "get back to the business of thoughtful debate" and stop talking among themselves about the alleged foreign funding of oil-sands critics.

Since the end of February, various Conservatives have been standing in the Red Chamber to participate in an inquiry initiated by Ontario Senator Nicole Eaton into the purported interference of foreign foundations in Canada's domestic affairs – a lament against the U.S. dollars they say are behind environmental activism in this country.

On Tuesday, the David Suzuki Foundation asked Canadians to fill out a [form letter on its website](#) telling Ms. Eaton and other senators they are disappointed by their attempts to silence and demonize those who don't share their positions.

"The Senate is supposed to be a house of sober second thought. As such, we expect more from our senators than uninformed and immature rhetoric that does nothing to further debate about matters of vital national importance," the letter says.

The issue of "relatively small amounts of international funding" is a distraction and an effort to silence and discredit organizations that are looking out for the interests of Canada and Canadians, the foundation's letter says.

Prime Minister Stephen Harper and Natural Resources Minister Joe Oliver have both [accused](#) environmental groups, like [Tides Canada](#), of taking money from U.S. donors to mount opposition against the \$6.6-billion Northern Gateway pipeline that would deliver oil-sands crude to the British Columbia, where it could be shipped to Asian markets.

Conservative in the Red Chamber have taken up the cause, telling other senators engaged in Ms. Eaton's inquiry about the alleged influx of American cash to Canadian environmental organizations.

Senator Don Plett asked his fellow senators: "If environmentalists are willing to accept money from Martians, where would they draw the line on where they receive money from? Would they take money from al-Qaeda, the Hamas or the Taliban?"

Senator Percy Mockler referred to the Suzuki Foundation and others as "qualified bad, not to mention ugly, foundations."

The debate can go on for months and, if the senators determine they want to hear from witnesses, they can send the matter off to a committee. Or they can simply draw conclusions from their own discussion.

Leanne Clare, a spokeswoman for the Suzuki Foundation, said "this Senate inquiry is not about learning more about protecting the environment. It's about trying to trying to discredit environmental groups. It's a smear campaign that's providing inaccurate and undemocratic debate."

But Ms. Eaton fired back, saying the letter-writing campaign marked a new low for David Suzuki and a sad day for democratic debate in this country. Since the inquiry was launched, many senators have contributed valuable insight and expertise into the discourse, she said in a news release.

"For example, Senator [John] Wallace addressed the current legislative framework in Canada. Senator [Larry] Smith investigated the economic consequences of this interference," she said. "Senator [Doug] Finley probed how much money was coming in and the path it was taking. Senator [Daniel] Lang pointed to lobby and political activities of some groups. Senator Mockler provided examples of positive and true charitable activity. Senator Plett explored how these activities are infringing on Canadian sovereignty."

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