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Clement blames Suzuki types for oil pipeline opposition

7:09 am, April 4th, 2013

TREASURY BOARD PRESIDENT TONY CLEMENT

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EDMONTON -- Environmentalists like David Suzuki are the biggest problem when it comes to public support for TransCanada's plan to ship Western Canadian crude to eastern refineries, says the president of the Treasury Board.

Addressing members of the Alberta Enterprise Group (AEG) at the Fairmont Hotel McDonald Wednesday night, Ontario MP and Treasury Board President Tony Clement said the pipeline is bound to be "very popular" back East, but faces significant opposition from environmental groups.

"The problem is not the labour unions, it's David Suzuki," Clement said. "Groups like David Suzuki's group are opposing this project even though for all intents and purposes this pipeline has always been there and all we're doing is reversing the flow."

If approved, the 4,400-km Eastern Oil Pipeline Project would be capable of transporting as many as 850,000 barrels of crude oil per day to refineries in Quebec and New Brunswick by 2017, TransCanada said Tuesday.

Clement said he's frequently asked about Alberta oil when he's back home in northern Ontario.

"Whenever I go door-to-door in my constituency or hold roundtables in Ontario, there's always someone asking, 'Why are we buying foreign oil when we have Alberta oil?'," said Clement during his Edmonton visit.

"There are some on the other side of the political leger who will never give the oilsands the credit it deserves, but that's not the common-sense view in Ontario.

"I think most people understand that the more we diversify where we're selling Alberta oil, the better it is for everybody."

The first questions Clement received from AEG members revolved around the federal government's responsibility to attract more skilled workers to Alberta and support the infrastructure development of the oilsands.

AEG president Tim Shipton said there's still negative misconceptions across Canada about Alberta's natural resources. Shipton said the federal government needs to reexamine it's decision making process on funding to major projects.

"If we don't start focusing on ways to get our major infrastructure projects completed -- and I'm not just talking about the oilsands -- we're going to be left behind," Shipton said.

Clement said he's not in a position to announce any new funding or initiatives to aid oilsands development, but that "those talks will certainly continue.

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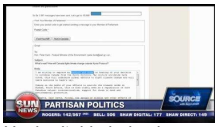

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"I think that as Canadians we understand that the continued development of the oilsands requires a massive influx of capital expenditure and it has to be something that business sees as a long-term investment prospect."

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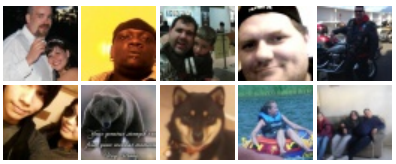

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