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What's so radical about caring for the Earth?

By David Suzuki with contributions from David Suzuki Foundation Editorial and Communications Specialist Ian Hanington

Caring about the air, water, and land that give us life. Exploring ways to ensure Canada's natural resources serve the national interest. Knowing that sacrificing our environment to a corporate-controlled economy is suicide. If those qualities make us radicals, as federal Natural Resources Minister Joe Oliver recently claimed in an [open letter](#), then I and many others will wear the label proudly.

But is it radical to care for our country, our world, our children and grandchildren, our future? It seems more radical for a government to come out swinging in favour of an industrial project in advance of public hearings into that project. It seems especially radical when the government paints everyone who opposes the Enbridge Northern Gateway pipeline project as American-funded traitors with a radical ideological agenda "to stop any major project no matter what the cost to Canadian families in lost jobs and economic growth."

It's bad enough when our government and its [ethical oil](#) and media supporters don't tell the truth, but it's worse when they don't even offer rational arguments. Their [increasing attacks on charitable organizations](#) and Canadians from all walks of life show that if they can't win with facts, they'll do everything they can to silence their critics. And we thought conservative-minded people valued free speech!

The proposed Northern Gateway and Keystone XL pipeline projects and the massive, mostly foreign-controlled expansion of the tar sands are [not about finding the best way to serve Canada's national interests](#). If we truly wanted to create jobs, we would refine the oil in Canada and use it to reduce our [reliance on imported oil](#), much of which comes from countries that government supporters say are "unethical". If we really cared about using resources for the national interest, we would slow development in the tar sands, improve environmental standards, increase royalties and put some of the money away or use it to switch to cleaner energy, eliminate [subsidies](#) to the [fossil fuel industry](#), and encourage Canadian companies to develop the resource.

Instead, we are called radicals for daring to even question the wisdom of [selling entire tar sands operations to China's state-owned oil companies](#) and building a pipeline so that the repressive government of China, rather than Canadians, can reap most of the benefits from the refining jobs, profits, and the resource itself. We are radical because we are concerned about the real dangers of oil-filled supertankers moving through narrow fiords with unpredictable weather conditions and through some of the last pristine ecosystems on Earth. We are condemned by our own government because we question the safety of [two pipelines crossing more than 1,000 streams and rivers through priceless wilderness](#) — a reasonable concern, in light of the [more than 800 pipeline spills](#) that Enbridge, the

company in charge of the Northern Gateway, has had since 1999.

And so here we are, a country with a government that boasts of our "energy superpower" status but doesn't even have a national energy plan. A country willing to sacrifice its manufacturing industry, its opportunities in the green-energy economy, its future, and the health of its people for the sake of short-term profits. A country hell-bent on selling its industry and resources wholesale to any country that wants them, without regard for the ethics or activities of those countries.

Our government is supposed to represent the interests of all Canadians, and not just those who voted for it or the corporations that support it. Instead we have a government that hurls insults at its citizens.

Canadians are better than that. While an investment banker like Joe Oliver or a former oil industry economist like Stephen Harper may look at Canada and only see numbers, we see a country rich in natural resources, wildlife, clean water, a diverse population of educated and caring people, and institutions that have been built up over the years to put the interests of Canadians first.

With recent or pending federal reviews into both environmental regulation and charitable giving, we can expect more attacks and more attempts to silence those who believe that we must at least have a discussion about our priorities before selling out our country to anyone who wants a piece. Maybe it's time to get radical!

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<http://www.davidsuzuki.org/blogs/science-matters/2012/01/whats-so-radical-about-caring-for-the-earth/>