



The Honourable Lisa Raitt, Minister of Natural Resources
The Honourable Jim Prentice, Minister of the Environment
The Right Honourable Stephen Harper, Prime Minister of Canada

Dear Minister Raitt, Minister Prentice and Prime Minister Harper,

The Council of Canadians is writing to express our serious concerns with the views you have conveyed on behalf of the Canadian government to U.S. officials about American policies aimed at addressing climate change.

Minister Raitt, this includes your letter dated April 21, 2009 to Governor Schwarzenegger regarding the now-passed Low Carbon Fuel Standard (LCFS) under the California Air Resources Board. Your letter issues a thinly veiled threat of an “unfair trade barrier” if Alberta’s tar sands is “discriminated” against as a high carbon intensity crude oil. Minister Prentice, your recent comments to U.S. lawmakers to stop “carbon-border adjustment” fees designed to prevent carbon pollution outside of the U.S. from undermining American measures to reduce emissions, is equally disturbing. Media reports indicate that you refer to “trade protectionism” in the name of environmental protection as a prescription for disaster for the global economy and the environment.

Alberta’s tar sands are the fastest growing source of greenhouse gas emissions in Canada. The recent Environment Canada greenhouse gas inventory demonstrates that Canadian emissions are on the rise, well beyond our Kyoto commitments, and that production in the tar sands are a significant factor in this. Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS) does not provide a ‘silver bullet’ solution. CCS is expensive requiring significant subsidies, the timeframe for its implementation is long and there is evidence that it will have limited capacity to reduce emissions in the tar sands. Measures addressing climate change, Canada or U.S. based will affect the tar sands if they are to be effective.

In addition to contributing to climate change, tar sands production uses large quantities of relatively clean burning natural gas (an important source for home heating), consumes and contaminates large volumes of water, is having a detrimental impact on boreal ecosystems and nearby First Nations communities have raised concerns over unusually high rates of cancers and the lack of recognition of aboriginal title and treaty rights.

These comments and others made by Canadian officials exhibit a disconcerting pattern to use trade-based threats to dissuade U.S. policy measures that would benefit the environment by reducing oil exports from Alberta’s environmentally destructive tar sands to U.S. markets.

Instead of looking to ensure future markets for tar sands oil in the U.S., the federal government should work with the Albertan government and use the market-based temporary pause in tar sands expansions to assess and address these serious social and environmental impacts and develop a plan to transition to sustainable energy production and consumption. Halting all tar sands expansions including infrastructure for export is an important first step.

Sincerely,

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