



Foreign influence a concern at Gateway hearing

By Carol Christian, Today staff

As the first round of oral hearings start Tuesday in Kitimat Village, B.C. into the controversial Northern Gateway pipeline, foreign influence at the hearings is a continuing issue.

A recent rebuke in the war of words bandied between opponents and proponents of the project was fired off Friday by EthicalOil.org.

The blog claimed a factual error by Jessica Clogg, West Coast Environmental Law's executive director and senior counsel, in a press release dated Thursday: "Our campaigns are not dictated by the sources of our funding."

According to page 191 of the foreign billionaire Rockefeller Brothers Fund tax return (<http://www.rbf.org/sites/default/files/2006%20RBF%20990-PF.pdf>), the \$100,000 (approved) in foreign money it gave to West Coast Environmental Law was specifically earmarked to prevent the development of a pipeline that endangers the Great Bear Rainforest, said Marshall.

"Our funding to support ordinary Canadians in keeping our magnificent north Pacific Coast free from the threat of oil tankers and oil spills is dwarfed by that of oil producers and refiners, which put up \$100 million to promote the Northern Gateway project and push it through the regulatory review," said Clogg in the release posted on her company's website.

"West Coast Environmental Law has been caught serving as a front group for a foreign special interest," said Kathryn Marshall, spokeswoman for EthicalOil.org and its new OurDecision.ca.

"It's time for the foreign special interests and their local front groups to butt out of our Canadian decision."

Marshall pointed out that "all relevant research" can be found at OurDecision.ca. Each ad in that new campaign, according to EthicalOil.org, highlights a different Canadian front group being paid by a foreign special interest.

The \$5.5 billion Northern Gateway project is a twin 1,177-kilometre pipeline system carrying oilsands crude from Bruderheim, Alberta, to a new marine terminal in Kitimat. The second pipeline will run east with condensate from Kitimat to Bruderheim. The crude is to be piped from the oilsands to Bruderheim by existing pipeline networks.

The vast majority of the pipeline will be buried up to a metre underground. The only exceptions will be select water crossings where it is safer to run the pipeline above the water crossing, according to Enbridge information.

The pipeline is expected to increase trade diversification for the oilsands.

The project is now before the Joint Review Panel, consisting of Minister of the Environment and the National Energy Board appointees, with hearings scheduled into March. The majority are being heard in B.C. Two sessions have been scheduled in Alberta: Jan. 24 to 27 and 30 to 31 at the Wingate Inn Edmonton and March 26 to 28 at the Quality Hotel Grande Prairie.

Opposition to the largest infrastructure project ever undertaken between Alberta and B.C. has been voiced by both interior and coastal aboriginal communities and grassroots groups since at least 2009.

The JRP has opened the hearings to foreign citizens and foreign lobbyists.

"Our job is to make sure that everyone who wants to talk to us about this project has an opportunity to be heard," said Sheila Leggett, NEB vice-chairwoman. "We'll take whatever time it takes to ensure that everybody's views are heard."

Also on Friday, Greenpeace Canada climate and energy campaigner Mike Hudema criticized Prime Minister Stephen Harper's comments the JRP process cannot be hijacked by foreign money to ultimately slowdown the process.

"No one should be fooled by this well-orchestrated campaign by multi-national oil companies, their phony front group and the Harper government to silence the opposition to these pipelines and the expansion of the tarsands that they enable," said Hudema.

He added that the oil industry's own polling shows that there are millions of Canadians opposed to this pipeline and have a right to be heard, not disenfranchised by some kind of U.S. Republican-style smear campaign.

"On the one hand, it is heartening to see that the oil industry and the Harper government are scared by the opposition of First Nations, environmental groups and ordinary people concerned about their health, water, land and the global climate crisis," said Hudema. "It is equally dismaying to witness the kind of smear tactics they will use in an attempt to (defend) this project."

Meanwhile, ForestEthics points to a recent independent telephone poll conducted by Forum Research that revealed British Columbians are almost split when it comes to the pipeline. The poll, of 1,045 people, had 41% in favour and 46% against, and 13% didn't have an opinion. Support was significantly higher among older respondents and males.

It may be only a 5% spread, but Andrew Frank, ForestEthics spokesman, maintains it "confirms what our own people on the ground have long known: A majority of northern B.C. residents, and a healthy

plurality of British Columbians, more generally, oppose this pipeline. There's a reason Premier (Christy) Clark will not take a position on Gateway."

Clark has been reported saying B.C.'s coast does not belong to Alberta, and has said in the past that her government is waiting for all the facts to be on the table with the national environmental review process, and the impacts on B.C. and for Canada.

A decision has been delayed until 2013, nearly a year later than originally expected, given the number of people and organizations — rumoured to be more than 4,000 — wanting to submit comments to the JRP.

Final arguments are scheduled for April 2013.

"Northern Gateway is not in the national interest, and citizens won't be tricked into believing it is by misleading polls, when in fact, the opposite is true," said Frank.

An Ipsos-Reid poll on the project conducted for Enbridge showed that support is well ahead of opposition. Nearly half (48% overall, 14% "strongly") of British Columbians said they support the project, compared to one-third (32% overall, 13% "strongly") in opposition. Two-in-ten (20%) are undecided about the project.

"Polling numbers routinely swing enormously depending on how the question is asked. In this case, the question of support for the pipeline is somewhat divorced from the threat of an oil spill," said Eric Swanson, campaign director at Dogwood Initiative, Thursday after the poll's release.

"We have been polling for the past five years about allowing oil tanker traffic in B.C.'s inside coastal waters and 75% of British Columbians consistently oppose introducing oil tankers to those waters."

Swanson pointed out that opposition to the project is very strong, and in the riding that stands to be most affected, Nathan Cullen, a vocal opponent of Gateway, was elected by a landslide in the last federal election.

Meanwhile, EthicalOil.org is calling on Canadians to tell Minister of Natural Resources Joe Oliver to ban foreigners and their local representatives from appearing before the JRP.

"Foreigners and foreign groups are registered to appear before the pipeline review panel, and we think Minister Oliver should exclude them," said Marshall. "Whether or not Canada decides to build this pipeline is a Canadian decision, based on Canadian interests."

She noted that the thousands of individuals and groups registered to give testimony about the pipeline include companies owned by foreign governments such as Hugo Chavez's CITGO oil company.

"Canadians must take a stand against foreigners and their lobbying groups interfering in our decision. Canadians have a lot at stake with this pipeline, and whichever way the decision goes, it should be made only by Canadians and in the best interest of Canada," added Marshall.