



by **Andrea Harden-Donahue**

TransCanada's Energy East: **Another broken pipeline plan**

Imagine that you step out your door for the morning commute, but your street is flooded. Not with water, but with toxic bitumen from the tar sands.

This is precisely what happened in Mayflower, a suburb in Arkansas, when Exxon's Pegasus pipeline spilled more than 1 million litres of tar sands crude earlier this year. This may be the future facing communities along the route of TransCanada's recently announced Energy East pipeline.

The 4,400-kilometre Energy East pipeline would carry up to 1.1 million barrels of oil per day, including tar sands crude, from Alberta to New Brunswick. It is expected to lead to massive tanker exports from Quebec and the Atlantic coast to send crude to much larger and more profitable markets.

The Council of Canadians opposes the Energy East pipeline because it would pose serious threats to local water

supplies, communities and coastal waters. It would promote the expansion of the tar sands, which contaminate the water, land and air of nearby communities, and stand in the way of the alternative energy future we need.

Which energy strategy do we want?

The Council of Canadians has called for a Canadian Energy Strategy guided by the principles of ensuring peoples' energy security and ecological sustainability. This strategy would prioritize meeting basic energy needs while dramatically improving energy conservation, energy efficiency and renewable energy generation as we stop relying on fossil fuels. It would prioritize public and community-owned energy solutions.

Prime Minister Stephen Harper and some provincial premiers, backed by the oil industry, are pushing for a different vision. Their energy strategy, which has been making headlines in the media recently, is about extracting and export-

ing natural resources for corporate profit regardless of the impacts on people and the environment. The Energy East pipeline is part of this strategy.

Pipelines assure tar sands expansion

TransCanada's Energy East pipeline is a multi-use pipeline that will carry a variety of crudes including conventional crude and bakken oil, the crude that exploded in Lac Mégantic. It also includes tar sands bitumen refined in Alberta (syncrude) and diluted bitumen. Bitumen, produced in the tar sands, is so thick it needs to be diluted with toxic chemicals in order to be shipped through pipelines. This product is known as "dil-bit."

The tar sands, Canada's fastest growing source of greenhouse gas emissions, already produce 1.9 million barrels of bitumen daily. There are plans for a threefold increase in production in coming years. With plans for TransCanada's Keystone XL pipeline to the Gulf

Coast and Enbridge's Gateway pipeline to the B.C. coast blocked by mass public protests, the oil industry and its allies in government are desperately trying to secure pipeline infrastructure to avoid bitumen production being literally landlocked, which would inevitably lead to massive profit losses.

Pipeline safety in question

The spill of more than 3.8 million litres of dil-bit in the Kalamazoo River in Michigan underscores how tar sands spills are exceptionally devastating. Conventional cleanup methods haven't been able to recover the heavy crude that sank to the bottom of the river bed. Three years, and more than \$800 million later, the river is still polluted.

The Energy East project would see the conversion of an existing gas pipeline – known as the Mainline – that runs from Saskatchewan to Quebec to carry crude oil. Under TransCanada's proposal, the pipeline would be extended on both ends. This pipeline, like the Pegasus pipeline that flooded the suburb streets of Mayflower, was designed to carry a lighter substance.

According to a study by the National Petroleum Council for the U.S. Department of Energy, "pipelines operating outside of their design parameters such as those carrying commodities for which they were not initially designed, or high flow pipelines, are at the greatest risk of integrity issues in the future due to the nature of their operation."

Evan Vokes, a former TransCanada engineer, recently testified at a Senate committee hearing about the industry's lax safety standards, stating: "What I have documented from the pipeline industry is that the mix of politics and commercial interests has resulted in false public claims of exceptional industry practice when the reality is

that industry struggles to comply with code and regulation."

Energy East: An export pipeline

The attempt to use nation-building rhetoric to build support for this project rests in large part on the premise that it will meet Atlantic energy security needs. However, there is reason to believe that this pipeline is really meant to get the crude to Atlantic ports so that it can be exported. Energy East would see crude reach tide-water near Quebec City at the Gulf of St Lawrence, and near Saint John, New Brunswick, at the Bay of Fundy through a new ice-free deepwater port. TransCanada and Irving Oil are building. Supertankers would carry diluted bitumen through these ecologically sensitive waters.

Once the crude reaches the oceans it would fetch higher world oil prices. This means the pipeline wouldn't lead to lower pump costs for Eastern Canada. Instead, it would be up for grabs to the highest bidder. According to a senior economist at Scotiabank, Energy East may "provide a new avenue to exporting crude, light or blended bitumen" and it "could open an economic route to Europe, India and possibly China."

Eastern refineries also have limited capacity to process tar sands dil-bit, requiring it to be exported for processing. There is also no assurance that crude refined in Quebec and Saint John will be prioritized for Eastern Canadians' oil needs. According to a press release from Irving Oil's Saint John refinery from early 2013: "The refinery exports over 80 per cent of its production to the U.S." as refined products such as gasoline.

Newfoundland actually already produces enough oil to meet Atlantic Canadian oil needs, but it is exported. Any discussion

about Atlantic energy security should consider redirecting these exports until we can transition off of fossil fuels.

Energy insecurity and fracked gas

Ironically, the Energy East pipeline may lead to a different energy shortage in Ontario and Quebec. A dispute is brewing between TransCanada and gas distributors including Union Gas, Enbridge and Gaz Métro over the proposed pipeline conversion from gas to oil. According to Gaz Métro's Vice President, in peak wintertime the TransCanada Mainline meets 40 per cent of Quebec and Ontario's natural gas needs. Industry representatives say switching the pipeline's use would lead to shortages.

Coast-to-coast pipeline opposition

The real nation-building happening right now is the coast-to-coast grassroots opposition to tar sands pipelines.

With members, supporters and allies along the Energy East pipeline route, the Council of Canadians intends to build awareness and work with those who would be directly impacted by this project. We received national media attention responding to the project's official announcement. We have been present at TransCanada's open houses and will participate in the upcoming National Energy Board proceedings. We are working with communities along the route including Ottawa, Thunder Bay and Saint John. By doing this, we are building local and provincial campaigns. In other words – borrowing a line from a favourite fictional character of mine – this pipeline shall not pass!

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