

February 16, 2018 – Restoring public confidence

When public confidence in something has been lost, it's a tall mountain to climb to restore that confidence.

Regrettably, Canadians' faith in the processes our nation employs to determine whether major natural resource projects like mines, pipelines and hydro dams should proceed was severely eroded under the government of Stephen Harper.

It is essential that Canadians have confidence that the processes we use to assess major projects are fair, inclusive and evidenced based – such that economic progress and environmental sustainability go hand in hand.

The critical need to restore public confidence is at the heart of the largest overhaul in a generation of Canada's environmental assessment processes that was announced last week. This announcement was the culmination of 14 months of consultation and deliberation – and it delivers on a major commitment we made during the 2015 election campaign.

I come at this from a fairly unique vantage point. I understand the perspectives and interests of both environmentalists and industry because I've worked with companies in the resource sector and have also been CEO of technology companies whose mission was focused on reducing the environmental footprint human beings have on this planet.

In this modern world, I truly believe that a key role of government is to find pathways that ensure that economic progress and environmental sustainability can and do go together.

That is precisely what the federal government was aiming to attain in launching a review and ultimately reform of Canada's environmental assessment processes.

The 340 pages of the new legislation, Bill C-69, address head-on the reasons Canadians told us they had lost confidence in the old system.

Canadians were concerned that project approvals were based on politics rather than robust science. They were concerned that changes were putting our fish, waterways and communities at risk and were not taking into account the climate impacts of projects.

They were concerned that the views of communities and Indigenous peoples were not being heard, and they were concerned that decisions were not transparent and timely.

This lack of trust resulted in polarization and paralysis.

Projects stalled and resource development became a lightning rod for public opposition and court challenges.

Billions of dollars of investment was put in jeopardy, raising concerns for investors and shareholders. Weaker rules hurt both our environment and economy.

Under the new legislation, a proposed resource project will be assessed on its overall sustainability, including economic and social effects; its environmental effects and ability to mitigate them; how it affects Indigenous rights; and whether it is consistent with Canada's international commitments to address climate change.

Going forward project reviews will have a significant focus on early engagement – to ensure that important issues are raised and addressed early in the process.

Such reviews will be completed through a more timely and predictable process. All will benefit from a more efficient and predictable process from start to finish.

I know that the changes announced last week will not satisfy everyone.

People who want every project to go ahead whatever the environmental cost will say we're doing too little to support resource development.

And those who tend to distrust business and want no project to go ahead will say we're doing too little to protect our environment.

But the new rules reflect what we heard overwhelmingly and consistently from Canadians over the past year and a half, and they reflect just good common sense.

Canadians want a modern regulatory system that will protect the environment and support Indigenous reconciliation but one that will also attract investment and ensure good projects can go ahead – creating new jobs and economic opportunities.

This legislation strikes at the heart of why I ran for public office. I feel very fortunate to have played a role in its creation in my role as Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change. I now look forward to ensuring it wins back your confidence through its implementation.

You can read the full text of my speech [here](#).