



Jonathan Wilkinson

NORTH VANCOUVER'S MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT

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A hyper-partisan spectacle

My concern about the growing hyper-partisanship in Canadian politics, sadly, reached new heights last month when what should have been standard parliamentary process descended into an appalling and symptomatic spectacle.

An all-party working group, the Natural Resources Committee, tasked to review and suggest improvements to legislation focused on building a prosperous, low-carbon economy, had its work obstructed for seven weeks by waves of delay tactics by Conservative members.

Conservative MPs proposed 20,000 frivolous amendments to draft legislation, the Sustainable Jobs Act, which runs all of 10 pages. These MPs made endless points of order and constant interruptions - at times talking at once into their microphones to drown out other speakers.

At one point, Conservative MPs spent 45 minutes arguing who could speak next.

Their filibuster included one Tory MP winding down the clock by waxing nostalgic about muscle cars he owned in the '70s.

Discussion and compromise

Political parties will – and in a democratic system, often should - disagree on matters of policy. However, parliamentary committees have traditionally been less partisan forums in which MPs try to truly listen to each other. Through good discussion and compromise at committee, MPs often can and have improved legislation.

But the recent behaviour of Conservative members of the Natural Resources Committee choked off even the possibility of a conversation and provided a circus act instead. This was, in my opinion, an outlandish waste of taxpayer dollars.

Making headway on sustainable jobs is critically important. Workers across this country rightly have a keen interest regarding how we create well-paying jobs in an economy that will increasingly

value low-carbon solutions. Delaying the committee's work risks sidelining Canada at a time when the world is moving rapidly toward a low-carbon economy.

Trojan horse?

Irrespective of tactics, why do Conservative MPs say they oppose the Sustainable Jobs Act? Well, for reasons that I sincerely find difficult to comprehend, they say the bill is a 'Trojan horse' aimed at phasing out Canada's oil and gas sector.

This charge is ludicrous, ideological fiction.

Canada's energy future very much includes an oil and gas sector which must be thoughtful and aggressive in decarbonizing its operations. While global demand for oil and gas will peak this decade, there will continue to be reasonable demand for low-carbon oil and gas in non-combustion applications (e.g., hydrogen, petrochemicals) even in a post 2050, net-zero world.

The Sustainable Jobs Act is designed to engage a public, transparent conversation about how we best develop a workforce and an economy that will ensure Canada remains competitive and prosperous in a much lower-carbon world.

Personally, I wonder whether the real Trojan horse in the Natural Resource Committee room last month was Mr. Poilievre's increasing use of obstructive and disruptive tactics for self-serving, partisan political purposes.

By fueling false narratives, he is deliberately generating fear and anger to be harvested and distilled into a political force.

Building an approach to politics that is based on fostering and furthering anxiety, anger and division may perhaps be good politics in these polarized times – though I certainly hope not.

Political dialogue in Canada has historically been far more thoughtful and respectful than this. Canadians deserve and should demand better.

Contact us: Constituency Office 604-775-6333

Email: Jonathan.Wilkinson@parl.gc.ca

Website: JonathanWilkinson.libparl.ca