April 25, 2019

Standing Senate Committee on Energy, the Environment and Natural Resources
Senate of Canada
By email: enev@sen.parl.gc.ca

Dear members of the Committee:

Subject: Bill C-69

I am writing to you on my own behalf, trusting that my voice as an ordinary citizen will be heard.

Across the world, citizens are experiencing the direct and violent consequences of climate change. Heat waves, extreme weather events, flooding, habitat loss, biodiversity loss, etc. Climate change is affecting their individual health, living conditions and financial situations, as well as the environment itself.

In Quebec, we are currently experiencing flooding that will mean significant financial hardship for local residents and require them to leave their homes, and all the accompanying social and psychological effects of dealing with an unexpected emergency through no fault of their own, and despite all the help they are being offered. This is but one example of issues that citizens have had to deal with in recent years—another example would be shoreline erosion along the St. Lawrence River.

However, our societies are not taking action, or at least not fast enough. Our elected officials that have the power to change things are bowing to the pressure and power of the various lobby groups. The pressure is unrelenting to stop any initiative that might help improve things.

I am seeing growing cynicism in the older generation and eco-anxiety in the younger generation in the face of this inaction, and our laws are getting weaker due to pressure from oil and gas lobbies, among others. They are touting natural gas as the energy of the future, or a transition fuel, and they fail to mention that almost all natural gas these days is from hydraulic fracturing, or fracking, which is extremely harmful to the environment and human health, not to mention that methane has a larger impact over the course of its life than CO\textsubscript{2}, which is what we are trying to eliminate.
In Quebec, civil society has mobilized multiple times since 2010 to protect our environment and habitat, our source of life and our future, by protesting the development and transport of oil sands and shale gas through their area and near their water sources.

It is not that there are no solutions and that there is nothing we can do. Our societies are well educated, and we are lucky to live in a country with any number of alternatives available, if we plan to develop sustainable energy and new alternative technologies. The industry could adjust.

It makes no sense to me that we expect citizens, on the one hand, to deal with the negative effects of climate change, including health issues, financial losses and a lower quality of life, to adapt and to accept the status quo with no hope of improvement, while on the other hand, the industries that create GHG emissions are continuing their activities and plan to scale up their production, to the detriment of the public they claim to serve. And of course, they are doing so while seeking to eliminate or restrict the rules that protect the public.

Shouldn’t we agree that these industries have had plenty of time to prepare for the transition and make the necessary adjustments? Shouldn’t we be asking them to make the same effort to adapt as all other members of society? Don’t they also have children who have rights, including the right to live on a healthy planet in a healthy environment?

The science is clear: thousands of scientists have been saying it for more than 30 years. We now know that 80% of oil and gas needs to stay in the ground. If no one is willing to follow their advice, going against the most basic reasons, how will mere citizens be able to defend their lives? Because for citizens, at the end of the day, that is what it is about. We have been reduced to defending our lives, our life expectancy, our quality of life, the life and health we enjoy thanks to clean water, air and land, to reach our full potential.

Given our governments’ lack of consistency and the voraciousness of private industry, which does not have a mandate to protect the well-being of the public now or in the future, and certainly is not committed to it, we need legislation that truly protects citizens’ rights, such as the right to a healthy environment, now and for future generations. Shouldn’t there be a principle of justice to level the playing field?

For all these reasons, I urge you to do everything in your power to ensure that Bill C-69 is passed before the upcoming election.

My main concerns are to increase the independence of the federal energy regulatory agency; to ensure that Indigenous communities and Quebec citizens can participate in the process, even if they are not directly affected by the project being assessed, and that they can follow the progress of files being assessed; to ensure that assessed projects are assessed over their entire lifespan, from beginning to end, and taking into
consideration all potential effects on the environment and the population from a health and socio-economic perspective, including the cumulative effect overall, such as the presence of other industries; and to ensure that all environmental decisions are science-based and protect the air, waterways and land from pollution.

In addition, the Act, its regulations and the decisions that comply with the Act should be protected from changes of government, and from elected officials who want to change them: proposed amendments should have to be science-based, proven and voted in a democratic framework and should have to respect the principle of always protecting nature, the environment, and individuals on a biological, psychological and social level.

The right to live in a healthy environment should be an inalienable right enshrined in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, but at the very least the spirit of this principle should guide all decisions that affect the environment.

I trust you will be sympathetic to these arguments; I am relying on your wisdom.

Yours sincerely,

Gisèle Comtois