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Bill C-48, An Act respecting the regulation of vessels that transport crude oil or persistent oil to or from ports or marine installations located along British Columbia's north coast

By videoconference, 10:30am ET – 11:30am ET

Thank you for inviting the Canada West Foundation to provide testimony with respect to Bill C-48.

To put our work and comments in context, the Canada West Foundation is a non-partisan and evidence-based. We consider ourselves environmentalists – we support a carbon tax. I myself have been a solar panel user for 20 years. But we also recognize the importance of our resources and getting them to markets.

My comments will have three components. Each one sets our reasons why the Senate should refuse to pass this Bill.

First, the bill is frankly un-Canadian in clearly favouring some regions over others. It would jeopardize economic activity in one part of the country while ignoring even greater and arguably riskier tanker activity in many other parts of Canada, which is encouraged activity to support economic activity in those other parts of the country. There is no similar ban on any oil tanker traffic along any of Canada's other coastlines – of which there is a great deal. This is fundamentally un-Canadian.

The northern West Coast is beautiful and pristine, but it does not have a monopoly on either of those qualities. Oil tankers travel the coastline of New Brunswick to deliver oil from Saudi Arabia to the Irving Oil refinery. The ruggedly beautiful coast of Newfoundland has significant oil rigs operating offshore – and they have meant the difference between poverty and prosperity for many Newfoundlanders. Consider Vancouver – why is it any less deserving of environmental protection than any other part of the coastline? There is wildlife, there are residents and there is tourism, all of which would be affected by a spill. Except that the city of Vancouver would not exist as it is without being a major port. So all that maritime traffic is not only OK, but encouraged. The St. Lawrence River is jammed with tankers bringing oil to refineries in Quebec – which of course are important for jobs there. Bill-C-48 would prevent Canadian oil from getting to Asian markets via, for example, the deep-

water ports of Kitimat or Prince Rupert – and directly hurt the Albertan and Saskatchewan and coastal B.C. economies – including several Indigenous groups who are also dead set against this bill. How is that fair? In our view, it is not. And couching this as protecting the coastal environment is ultra-selective, hypocritical, and, frankly, an un-Canadian effort by an anti-oil sands lobby run amok.

In acting for all Canadians, we hope the Committee will ask some basic questions – specifically why this bill is completely inconsistent with what we do on all of our other coasts.

We must not pick and choose where and when we exercise our environmental conscience – particularly when doing so favours jobs in some parts of the country but kills others.

Second, the bill is based on faulty evidence. Some excellent work has been done by Stewart Muir of Resource Works on this issue, which I will reference in my comments here. Bill C-48 will do nothing to address the extensive tanker traffic that passes by from Alaska – four daily crude tankers carrying Alaskan oil southward, albeit out of sight of land – it would only prevent those coming into a Canadian port. Unemployed Canadians on the shore will have that much more time to watch with envy the many tankers going by, with oil that the U.S. is selling – to their advantage; certainly not ours. The government has to this point not presented any economic study or scientific research that supports the ban. Senator Michael MacDonald of Nova Scotia has pointed out that the Department of Fisheries and Oceans has itself shown that Ridley Island near Prince Rupert is the safest potential oil port on the whole west coast, better suited to tanker shipping than even Vancouver itself.

But there are better alternatives. The Galapagos Islands, the Great Barrier Reef and the Baltic Sea are special, too, but oil tanker traffic has not been banned in those places. However, the use of what are called Particularly Sensitive Sea Areas (PSSAs), by the International Maritime Organization, is an excellent, pragmatic way of dealing with those concerns. Why can't we do that here? In the case of the Baltic Sea PSSA, this means traffic separation schemes, pilotage rule, mandatory reporting systems and areas that must be avoided. We should use this approach – on whatever parts of Canada's coastline we consider sensitive.

Third, the Senate has an obligation as you well know to ensure good legislation. Often, thanks to good and thorough work, important amendments are made to improve on what comes from the House of Commons. We commend the efforts currently being undertaken by your colleagues in trying to find amendments to Bill C-69. There have also been times when the Senate has, rightly, simply said "No," and refused to pass a bill.

This should be one of those times.

This much more independent Senate has a hugely important role to play – NOT because of partisan obstructionism but to get crucial legislation right.

The country needs the Senate to ensure that we pass the right legislation in this country – and that we refuse to pass what isn't.