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Alberta's Athabasca Oil Sands: ripe time for development

"The question is not whether we should develop the Athabasca Oil Sands — but when. And the time is ripe now. We may never have as good a chance again. Among the industrialized nations of the world, Canada is in the unique position of being able to assure its future oil supplies, both for domestic uses and for export," said Jean-Pierre Goyer, Minister of Supply and Services, speaking recently at the Faculty of Commerce and Business Administration, University of British Columbia in Vancouver.

Mr. Goyer spoke of Canada's responsibilities not only to Canada but to the rest of the world — and in particular, to trading partners, such as the United States, Western Europe and Japan.

Canada should not forget, said Mr. Goyer, that although an adverse energy situation affects highly industrialized nations, it has an even greater effect on those countries that can least afford it. The energy crisis is capable of producing a recession in underdeveloped countries by restricting the supply of equipment from developed nations, as well as reducing their imports of raw material. We must, also consider, the effects on international aid programs, he said.

Mr. Goyer wondered whether Canada's energy policy would, therefore, be egocentric or if both national and international responsibilities, would be fulfilled.

In deciding its policy, he said, Canada's choices lay between two extremes: to do the minimum necessary to get through the crisis, or to seek, in the long term, to improve the structuring of North American, Japanese and perhaps general OECD or world energy position.

Which road to take?

No matter what the policy, the central issue was not whether or not to develop the oil sands but rather at what pace should the oil be developed. In Mr. Goyer's words:

"Will we seek only to meet our own requirements, such requirements

making it imperative to achieve full production from the oil sands by 1982, or shall we accelerate the development program in an attempt to assist the above-mentioned countries in the meantime?

"Do we prefer to develop the oil sands according to corporate objectives or national objectives?

"Do we prefer to drain our budget to finance the development of this important energy resource or do we prefer to accept outside financing while at the same time achieving full Canadian ownership?

"We are in the position of being able to have the development of the oil sands totally financed by our trading partners — and under total Canadian control. We may never be in such a position again.

"Canada would play a major role in alleviating the energy crisis. This would give us an important advantage during trade negotiations, and would give rise to great national pride and recognition."

Mr. Goyer spoke of the need for discussion between provincial and federal representatives before any solution to the present energy crisis can be found, because "we must first solve our internal problems and meet our own needs. But the solution of domestic problems must not be regarded as necessarily incompatible with the drafting of a strategy that would procure the maximum benefits for the entire world".

He rejected the pessimists who argued that Canada's resources were limited and who had little confidence in technological improvements.

"People often tend to forget," he declared, "the rapidity at which technology can be improved. If we take the example of President Kennedy, in 1960, when he said we would reach the moon in the next decade, he knew it could be done using near current technology, and roughly, he knew the costs of such a project — an attitude I describe as positive realism.

"I am an optimist, and optimists