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We need to get to yes on Site C --Project will provide clean, reliable and cost effective energy for more than 100 years

By Philip Hochstein, special to the Vancouver Sun

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Resource-based projects are facing unprecedented challenges in being approved and built in our province, and all British Columbians stand to lose as a result.

Our mining industry, a powerful economic engine for B.C., has faced significant opposition in recent years. Take, for example, the coal industry. We are seeing growing campaigns against coal exports, which is B.C.'s largest single export commodity. The coal industry employs 26,000 people and provides hundreds of millions in tax revenues that support health care, education and communities.

Our oil and gas industry is also facing well-organized — and presumably well-funded — opposition campaigns, most notably against major pipeline projects, two of which represent approximately \$11 billion in capital investment, 7,500 construction jobs, and about \$2 billion more in revenues to the B.C. government over their operating lives — again revenues that will pay for services British Columbians rely on.

Even the forest products industry, which has rebounded somewhat after some very lean years, still faces challenges as opponents continue to push for more restrictions on logging activities and more land to be set aside. The war in the woods is not over.

Astonishingly, even the need for the Site C project — clean and renewable energy — is being questioned in some quarters. This, despite the fact that more electricity will be needed as B.C.'s population and economy continues to grow.

Site C represents a significant economic boost for B.C. Construction would contribute \$3.2 billion to our GDP and generate about 33,000 jobs. It would also provide clean, reliable and cost-effective energy for more than 100 years.

Project critics decry the loss of agricultural land that will occur with the project without offering context. More than 99 per cent of Class 1 to 5 agricultural lands (land capable of crop production) in the Peace Agricultural Region will not be affected by Site C.

They also say cheaper alternatives are available. Yet the Joint Review Panel that recently reviewed the project concluded that Site C is the lowest cost alternative to meet B.C.'s long-term electricity needs. This is because after the initial capital cost, Site C will be inexpensive to operate and lock in low rates for many decades — much as BC Hydro's heritage assets have done.

Site C has been through a multi-year, comprehensive environmental review process. To go forward, the project needs environmental approval and a decision to proceed by the B.C. government.

We need to get to yes on Site C.

After all, what does it say about B.C. as a place to invest if a province powered by hydroelectricity is unable to permit and build a new hydro dam?

As always in B.C., the no industry is waiting to oppose everything. It is common to see environmental groups oppose all forms of energy, both clean and fossil fuel sources. They simultaneously oppose natural gas-fired electricity, hydroelectricity, and clean electricity generated by independent power producers.

It's unclear how they expect people and businesses to keep the lights on.

We need to protect our environment. But we also need economic development to provide jobs and generate revenues for cities and the province. There needs to be a balanced approach and it needs to be responsible.

Our province is at a crossroads where the path forward is either one of continued prosperity or one of a declining standard of living.

Ultimately, elected officials bear the weight of decision-making around project development, while the public bears the consequences. The no industry is not accountable for the problems caused by not proceeding with a project nor do they speak for most British Columbians.

We need to stop saying no to projects in B.C. and find ways to get to yes. This is common sense and in the last provincial election, British Columbians demonstrated that they understand it.

Let's send a signal that B.C. really is open for investment and we are confident that our economic future is bright. Let's say yes to Site C.

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