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MIKE OTTO

SEARCHING FOR BRIGHT IDEAS The provincial government has said it will release new legislation on CO₂ emissions.

Emission regulation debated

LACINA DESJARLAIS
News Staff

With Albertans calling for increased governmental focus on environmental issues and the provincial Conservatives set to announce new legislation concerning carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions this week, the question of slowing production in the oil sands has arisen. However, according to some experts, this may not be the best way to solve the emissions problem.

According to Andrew Leach, professor of environmental economics and researcher at the University of Alberta, the oil sands have become the "whipping-boy" for emissions reductions.

"Oil sands emissions are about three per cent of Canada's emissions. [For Canadians] to say that what we should do is just stop all oil sands development, and let that be the way we reduce emissions, is probably a pretty naïve and very costly policy," said Leach. "Fossil fuels make up about 20 per cent of Canada's emissions, oil sands is one little chunk of that, so it's probably getting a disproportionate amount of attention."

Leach suggests that the oil sands are not the culprit to blame for increased

CO₂ levels and points to research by the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers (CAPP) that suggests the oil sands as account for only a small proportion of Canada's overall fossil fuels emissions.

Alberta Environment Minister Rob Renner takes a similar standpoint, admitting that Alberta's economy is largely driven by the production of oil and gas, and that the government has no plans in the immediate future to put the brakes on oil sands growth.

"[The Conservative Party] believes that the decision to either speed up or slow down the growth of the oil sands is one that needs to be decided upon by industry. Alberta has an economy that is driven and largely based on the production of oil and gas, and as such it is probably not likely that we're going to reduce the production of carbon dioxide there," Renner said.

While both Leach and Renner agree that the oil sands shouldn't be the ultimate target for emissions reductions, they have different views as to what should be done to cut back on greenhouse gases.

Renner has asserted that through new legislations, the government will be hard-lining heavy industry throughout the province into better

managing their emissions. According to Renner, this wouldn't mean pressuring industrial sectors to scale back production, which could signify a hit to the Albertan economy, but would see industries being encouraged to buy into new technologies that would remove or reduce atmospheric CO₂.

"What we plan to do is manage the CO₂ through various technologies like carbon capture and sequestration [isolating CO₂ from the air]," Renner said.

While Renner says that the Conservative government is looking into technologies like this as a solution to carbon emissions reductions, Leach argues that there are more simple and timely solutions for greenhouse gas cutbacks; place the responsibility on consumers.

"We don't want more expensive energy, we want cheaper energy and fewer emissions—well, it's maybe not going to happen," Leach said. "Canadians have to start walking the walk; if you think climate change is an issue then say you're willing to pay a \$1.20 per litre for gas."

"As long as we keep saying, 'Tax the industry; don't let industry pass price changes on to consumers; we can't afford to pay for it,' we don't have a hope," he added.

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