

OUR LAND IS OUR FUTURE

UNION OF BRITISH COLUMBIA INDIAN CHIEFS

FOUNDING HEAD OFFICE
209 - 345 Chief Alex Thomas Way
Kamloops, B.C. V2H 1H1
Tel: 250-828-9746
Fax: 250-828-0319



VANCOUVER OFFICE
401 - 312 Main Street
Vancouver, B.C. V6A 2T2
Tel: 604-684-0231
Fax: 604-684-5726
1-800-793-9701
Email: ubcic@ubcic.bc.ca
Web: www.ubcic.bc.ca

March 30, 2020

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau
Office of the Prime Minister
80 Wellington Street
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A2
Via Email Only: pm@pm.gc.ca

Honourable Patty Hajdu
Minister of Health
Confederation Building, 278 House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A6
Via Email Only: Patty.Hajdu@parl.gc.ca

Honourable John Horgan
Premier of Executive Council
Parliament Buildings
Victoria, British Columbia V8V 1X4
Via Email Only: premier@gov.bc.ca

Honourable Adrian Dix
Minister of Health
Parliament Buildings
Victoria, British Columbia V8V 1X4
Via Email Only: HLTH.Minister@gov.bc.ca

OPEN LETTER: Coastal GasLink Pipeline Project Must be Halted Due to the COVID-19 Outbreak

Dear Prime Minister Trudeau, Minister Hajdu, Premier Horgan, and Minister Dix,

We urge you to act swiftly to protect the public's health from the heightened risks of COVID-19 transmission posed by ongoing construction of the Coastal GasLink Pipeline Project. Most vulnerable to the spread will be frontline healthcare workers, project workers, and local Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities forced to shoulder the consequences for any disregard for health and safety.

Directed by Resolution 2019-07, the Union of BC Indian Chiefs has called on Canada and B.C. to honour Wet'suwet'en Title and Rights that have never been extinguished and are confirmed by the S.C.C. in *Delgamuukw*. Under the standards enshrined in the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, legislated in BC and affirmed by Canada, free, prior, and informed consent of proper Title and Rights holders impacted must be achieved before any approval of any project affecting their land, territories, and other resources.

The risks posed by continued work on the Coastal GasLink project are ones that were not consented to, and ones that leaders and officials raised warnings about in advance of the project's approval. Although B.C. is in a State of Emergency, Coastal GasLink days ago announced the successful completion of their

winter construction. The B.C. Government has enabled this with overbroad classifications of “essential services” that allow the work to continue. In 2014, while project applications were under review, Northern Health officials flagged that the region’s primary care resources for resident populations were at capacity, and they had concerns about the pressure that project workers could put on the healthcare system.

At time of writing, Northern Health region has the fewest confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the province. As Coastal GasLink continues their spring work, the “critical activities” they are undertaking include pipe delivery and stockpiling, in addition to site preparation and maintenance. With the urgency to move materials comes the associated movement of people and spillover risks to every person and community they interact with delivering supplies to the project. Corporate exceptionalism cannot become a pandemic response strategy for the Governments of B.C. and Canada.

B.C. and Canadian health officials have urged the public to stay home. The expansion of economic enterprises cannot be considered essential when it directly endangers the health and wellbeing of every one of us. The threat is too great to Northern communities, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, whose access to healthcare and necessary resources for containing COVID-19 are already limited. We urge you to tell Coastal GasLink to stay home.

On behalf of the UNION OF BC INDIAN CHIEFS



Grand Chief Stewart Phillip
President



Chief Don Tom
Vice-President



Kukpi7 Judy Wilson
Secretary-Treasurer