



O'NEILL: Oil tankers are already plying B.C. waters safely

By [Terry O'Neill - The Tri-City News](#)

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FACE TO FACE: Should oil tankers be allowed off B.C.'s north coast?

Most British Columbians want to see oil-tanker traffic banned off the northern coast of B.C. and so it's no surprise that many politicians running in the current federal election are of like mind.

To me, however, it's clear that, until the wind blows at reliably brisk pace (which it doesn't), and until the sun shines steadily upon our roofs (which it certainly doesn't in the Tri-Cities), and until rivers flow at a reliable rate (which they never will), and until nuclear power plants are made safer and more acceptable to consumers (which may yet transpire), the world's best, most reliable form of energy will continue to be carbon-based.

Global-warming threat or not, oil, gas and coal will continue to power our cars, heat our homes and, in many parts of the world, power the turbines that create electricity for decades to come. Unless, of course, we want to go back to the horse-and-buggy age.

Nevertheless, before the election was called, Liberal MP Joyce Murray of Vancouver introduced a private member's bill to ban oil tankers around Prince Rupert and Haida Gwaii, saying the ban would protect the environment by preventing an oil spill that "would change our province forever."

"Forever" is undoubtedly a long time and I suspect Ms. Murray is guilty of exaggeration. Regardless, I've got to wonder why, if she was so worried about the effects of an oil spill up north, she didn't widen the scope of her bill to include the southern coast. The same omission was evident in an anti-tanker motion passed by the opposition last year.

But, of course, there's an inconvenient truth here: Tankers regularly ply the waters of Burrard Inlet and the southern coast without major incident. Moreover, the product they provide is vital to our economy — turning off the spigot would be catastrophic.

I suspect that an underlying motivation for Ms. Murray's selective outrage is her opposition to the source of the product that would be shipped out of northern B.C.: the Alberta oil sands.

Strange, then, that she would cite environmental concerns when it has been shown that the oil sands' development actually ends up leaving a more verdant environment in its wake and that the refineries' notorious tailings ponds pose less of a risk to birds than do windmills.

An award-winning journalist, a writer with Edmonton's Report Magazine and Toronto's Catholic Insight magazine, and co-host of RoadkillRadio.com, Face to Face columnist Terry O'Neill is a long-time Coquitlam resident who sits on the board of the Coquitlam Foundation and chairs the finance committee of St. Joseph's Catholic parish.

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