LEGISLATIVE DEVELOPMENTS
AND
QUÉBEC’S POLITICAL SITUATION WITH REGARD TO
THE GREAT LAKES AND ST. LAWRENCE RIVER

Speaking Notes for a
Great Lakes Legislative Caucus Webinar
to be held March 27, 2015

Québec City
March 27th 2015
Introduction

- Good afternoon,
- My name is Guy Ouellette, I’m the Member of the National Assembly of Québec for the riding of Chomedey.
- I’m happy to be here today to outline the main legislative and political developments that have occurred in the area of environmental protection and safe drinking water in Québec since our last meeting in July 2014.

Drilling and construction of an oil port in Cacouna

- One of the main issues in this area concerns TransCanada’s offshore drilling and construction of an oil port in Cacouna on the St. Lawrence River.
- Exploratory drilling began in August 2014 but was suspended one month later following a Québec Superior Court decision, which raised concerns about the impact of the offshore drilling on the reproduction of beluga whales, an endangered species.
- In response, the Québec department of sustainable development, the environment and the fight against climate change announced that TransCanada may not resume seismic testing off Cacouna unless it submits a proposal that is acceptable to the department.
This proposal must meet a number of conditions that include ensuring social acceptability; producing an environmental assessment; providing an emergency response measures plan; taking economic and environmental responsibility in the event of an oil leak or spill; and demonstrating that the project will generate economic and fiscal spin-offs for all of Québec.

TransCanada is currently assessing the situation. It has until March 31, 2015 to announce its intentions regarding this oil port project.

TransCanada’s project to build an oil pipeline crossing the St. Lawrence Valley and the Témiscouata region to link Alberta and New Brunswick has also raised concerns among many Quebecers.

The risk of leaks or spills and their adverse effects on drinking water sources in many Québec regions must be assessed. An environmental impact study of the project as a whole will be carried out shortly by the BAPE, Québec’s environmental public hearings office.

**Water Withdrawal and Protection Regulation**

- Another important development concerns the Water Withdrawal and Protection Regulation that came into force in August 2014 – with the exception of a few sections.
- The Regulation implements a new regime for authorizing water withdrawals to better protect Québec’s drinking water sources. It also provides a framework for activities related to oil and gas exploration and production.
- In future, there will be protection zones for surface water withdrawals, and municipalities will have to analyze the vulnerability of their drinking water supply sources to determine each source’s potential risks and establish adapted protection measures.

Projects under way

- In the coming months, a review of the *Environment Quality Act* will be undertaken. In February 2015, the Government announced that the environmental authorization process in effect since 1972 would be modernized.
- The goals of this modernization effort are to integrate the fight against climate change in the authorization process; to target projects with major environmental impacts; to simplify the process for low-impact projects while maintaining environmental requirements; and to increase the department’s efficiency.
- A discussion paper will be tabled this spring. Consultations will follow, and a bill will be announced in the National Assembly in the fall.
- Finally, the Government is currently developing a maritime strategy to highlight Québec’s maritime potential in the context of growing international trade. This was highlighted in yesterday’s Quebec budget ($1, 5 billion granted until 2020).
- A ministerial committee was formed to oversee the maritime strategy's implementation and work on its development. Details regarding the Québec Maritime Strategy should be released by June 2015.
On Monday of this week, Quebec Premier Philippe Couillard met with Vermont’s governor, Peter Shumlin. They signed a partnership renewing their cooperation that started 27 years ago in regard to water quality, protection against invasive species and other environmental management issues in Lake Champlain.

Conclusion

In closing, I’d like to point out that Québec City will host the next Leadership Summit of the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Governors and Premiers in June. A number of issues that are relevant for our legislative caucus will be discussed at that time.

Thank you for your attention.