

First Nations and other opponents will "do what's necessary and whatever it takes" to stop the proposed

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Douglas Channel, the proposed termination point for an oil pipeline in the Enbridge Northern Gateway Project, is pictured in an aerial

view in Kitimat, B.C., on Tuesday, Jan. 10, 2012. (Darryl Dyck / THE CANADIAN PRESS)

First Nations and other opponents will "do what's necessary and whatever it takes" to stop the proposed Northern Gateway pipeline, a British Columbia chief

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says days ahead of the project's expected approval.

The federal government is expected to give Enbridge's \$7-billion pipeline project the green light early this week, just as the House rises for the summer break.

The pipeline would carry Alberta bitumen across British Columbia to a port in Kitimat, where it would board tankers for shipment to Asian markets.

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Grand Chief Stewart Phillip speaks with CTV Question Period about the Northern Gateway pipeline on Sunday, June 15, 2014.

The project is facing fierce opposition in B.C. over concerns of potential environmental devastation in the event of an oil spill. Coastal residents, First Nations communities and the province are also seeking a share of the project's economic benefits.

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Grand Chief Stewart Phillip, president of the Union of B.C. Chiefs, says if the project gets the go-ahead, opponents are considering options to block it, including as many as a dozen lawsuits and civil disobedience.

"We fully expected the Harper government to make every effort to ram this project through," Phillip told CTV's Question Period in an interview that aired Sunday. "But...there's enormous solidarity here in British Columbia between First Nations people, British Columbians, Canadians, and we'll do what's necessary and whatever it takes to stop this project."

Workshops are underway to teach opponents civil rights and "legal rights with respect to arrest procedures," Phillip said.

Despite strong opposition in B.C., some three-dozen business leaders touted the project in an open letter that appeared as a full-page ad in newspapers across the country late last week.

Former Newfoundland and Labrador premier Brian Tobin, one of the letter's signatories, called such projects "possible," but acknowledged that "they're not easy."

Tobin was in power when the provincial government was working out agreements for the Hibernia, Terra Nova and White Rose offshore oil projects.

While such projects can have a profound impact on Canada's economic prosperity, they should go forward only after stakeholders' concerns are met, Tobin told The Canadian Press.

"I'm saying let's see if we can work together and rise to the challenge and make this thing happen in an environmentally safe way, in a manner that shares the benefits across British Columbia, Alberta and, in particular, makes equity participants -- ownership participants -- of First Nations communities," Tobin said.

D'Arcy Levesque, vice president of public and government affairs at Enbridge, said the

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company has signed equity agreements with 26 First Nations partners that represent more than 60 per cent of the aboriginal population along the pipeline's right of way.

"We remain committed to working with and to try earning the trust and respect of other First Nations along the right of way," Levesque told Question Period. "We know that's a long process, but we're very committed to doing that."

Former federal cabinet minister Jim Prentice had been helping Enbridge tout the project to B.C.'s First Nations communities. Prentice stopped that work to run in the Alberta Progressive Conservative leadership race, but he left behind "an excellent team that continues to work on our behalf," Levesque said.

Asked about Enbridge's claim to be engaging in meaningful dialogue with First Nations, Phillip replied: "No, absolutely not. Nothing could be further from the truth. In many ways, the Enbridge file is a case study in how not to engage First Nations people."

He also rejected the claim that the company has reached equity agreements with First Nations, and that Prentice had made progress in talks.

"Mr. Prentice was here for a short while and in spite of donning the buckskin vest, so to speak, the opposition to Enbridge's Northern Gateway pipeline proposal is deeply entrenched," Phillip said.

When a National Energy Board panel approved the project last December, it attached 209 conditions. Enbridge is "working on what it will take to meet all 209," Levesque said. The company also wants to meet the five conditions set out by the B.C. government, and "try earning the trust and respect of other First Nations" along the pipeline's right of way.

It will be impossible for the company to placate everyone, he said. But "most fair-minded Canadians recognize that it's critical that we open up new markets for our most valuable commodity: crude oil."

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But for Phillip, the talk of job creation and other economic benefits does not outweigh the project's risks of pipeline ruptures and other problems.

"This line traverses thousands of kilometres of a very crucial watershed, rivers and streams that are essential to our wild salmon fishery," he said, adding that a tanker spill "would be catastrophic to the marine life along the coast."

Read more: <http://www.ctvnews.ca/politics/b-c-chief-we-ll-do-whatever-it-takes-to-stop-north-ern-gateway-1.1869645#ixzz34kXBa2Fv>