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Transcript: Teen envisions bleak future in statement to pipeline review panel

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The following is a verbatim transcript of the oral statement presented to the Enbridge Northern Gateway Project Joint Review Panel in Vancouver by high school student Sam Harrison.

Hi, my name is Sam Harrison. From other people's statements, I take it the norm is to list your credentials and the reasons why the panel should listen to you in the first few sentences. Well, I don't really have any. I'm 16 years old, halfway through high school, and the leader of a small group lobbying for action on climate change. That's really about it.

There is one really important reason I hope you will take what I have to say under advisement. I'm a kid. I'm part of the generation that will be left to clean up the mess left behind by my parents' generation. We're the ones who will have to inherit this world from you, so I hope you will listen carefully to why building a pipeline to export 82 million tonnes of carbon dioxide out of B.C. is a bad idea.

It's the 21st century and we've reached a pivotal point in human history. We simply can't keep doing what we're doing. There is no debate. Climate change is the issue of our time. It will define who we are and what our legacy will be for the rest of human civilization. We're not living on the planet you were born into anymore. By the time I graduate university five years from now, it's estimated that in the summer, the Arctic ice will be gone.

We've taken one of the few features that makes planet earth what it is and as a species, we've broken it. By the time I have kids, it's predicted crop yields in much of Africa will have fallen by as much as 25 per cent, leaving millions to starve. The continent will be struck by international conflict, fighting over the few sources of fresh water and food that are left.

By the time my future kids are graduating high school, almost half the species on earth will have

gone extinct. If the melting Himalayan glaciers continue and they disappear, the 2 billion people that depend on them for fresh water will have to move. As of now, there are more refugees caused by climate change than by war. This is the planet you have left for us. Is that what you want your generations' legacy to be?

Frankly, now much of the science is pointing to the fact that we can't stop these things. The Arctic will melt; the world will experience the next mass extinction. My generation will have to deal with the consequences. Surely, your generation owes it to us to not make it worse.

The International Energy Agency says we have five years to curb global greenhouse gas emissions. It may just be my youthful naiveté, but if that's the case, expanding our network to extract, sell and burn fossil fuels seems highly impractical which brings us to another point.

People say, "Well, if we don't sell it, someone else will. We should sell it while we can and we'll build the Canadian economy." Frankly, that may be true. Maybe if we don't sell it, someone else will, but that certainly doesn't make it okay. I assure you, no parent ever has said to their kid, "Don't worry, it's okay to become a drug dealer because if you sell - if you don't sell drugs, drug addicts will give their money to someone else. You should profit while you can."

That's just wrong.

Furthermore, they say it will grow the economy. Well, I have a message for you on behalf of youth all around the world. That is not the economy we want for our future. We simply cannot keep investing in fossil fuel infrastructure. The Enbridge pipeline would export the equivalent of 82 mega tonnes of CO₂ per year. That's more than B.C. emits as an entire province.

We have quite some progressive policies in place in the B.C. government and allowing this project to go through our province will be going in the exact wrong direction. We need to drastically reduce emissions and becoming a carbon superhighway to the Pacific is not the way to do it. Regardless of where the oil is burned, it will have the same effect on all 7 billion of us.

Canadians are supposed to be the nicest people on earth. That's one of the stereotypes I actually like about us, but we can't be if our entire economy is based on selling fossil fuels. It's time we draw a line in the sand.

This is why I've spent my high school career not partying and hanging out with friends, but advocating for political change because I know, even if we don't stop this project, some day when I have kids and they look me in the eyes and ask, "What the hell were you thinking, why didn't you do anything about this?" I know I'll be able to look them back in the eyes with absolute confidence and say, "I'm sorry. I tried my very hardest."

Will you? Please don't let this pipeline go through.

Thank you very much to each of you.

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