

Stephen Harper says pipelines ‘safest way you can go’ when transporting oil

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OTTAWA – Prime Minister Stephen Harper said Friday that while he thinks new pipeline projects are a good idea in principle, individual proposals will undergo “rigorous” review.

“I think the reality of anybody who looks at the business (is) that the absolute safest way to transport energy products is through pipelines. That’s the safest way you can go,” the prime minister told a news conference in Quebec City. He was responding to concerns about a new east-west pipeline proposal announced earlier this week.

The prime minister said he thinks such pipeline projects are a good idea in principle, because they benefit regions across Canada and enhance the country’s energy security. But he said they are subject to “rigorous independent analysis.”

“In terms of addressing specific concerns, there is a process that will do that, and the government will ensure that all recommendations from that process are followed,” he said.

Harper’s remarks came a day after Calgary-based [TransCanada said it plans to move ahead with its Energy East pipeline project](#). The project will expand an existing pipeline network to enter Quebec and end in New Brunswick. The comments also come at a time of heightened sensitivity about the transportation of crude oil after the Lac-Mégantic disaster, in which an unmanned runaway train carrying crude oil exploded and devastated the eastern Quebec town.

For new energy projects, Harper said the government acts on the independent evaluations that look at environmental and economic effects, “particularly on independent scientific evaluations.”

“But obviously we think it is a good idea in principle in terms of selling our energy products,” he said. “We have massive energy resources in this country. ... It’s important that Canadians all across the country benefit, and it’s important that we enhance our own energy security.”

Harper was also asked to respond to criticisms of the contentious proposed Keystone XL pipeline’s job creation potential.

Earlier this week, U.S. President Barack Obama again waded into the heated Keystone debate, saying the proposed pipeline that would carry crude oil from Canada’s oil sands to the U.S. Gulf Coast is “not a jobs plan” and would only create about 2,000 construction jobs.

On Friday, Harper responded by saying his government’s top priority is job creation, and its perspective on Keystone is “very well known by everyone in Washington.”

“Clearly this is a project that will create jobs on both sides of the border,” Harper said. “It is, in our judgment, an important project not just for our economy and for job creation, but for the long-term energy security of North America.”

TransCanada’s east-west pipeline proposal, which would move more than a million barrels of crude oil per day to refineries in New Brunswick, has the enthusiastic support of the premiers of Alberta Premier Alison Redford and New Brunswick Premier David Alward.

“This is truly a nation-building project that will diversify our economy and create new jobs here in Alberta and across the country,” Redford said in a statement on Thursday. Alward called the project a “game changer.”

But Quebec Premier Pauline Marois has been non-committal. She said last week her province would study the proposal when TransCanada releases more details.

The project also still needs to clear numerous regulatory hurdles, with TransCanada’s announcement Thursday meaning the company is pushing ahead with formal applications for approval.

Harper was in Quebec City with Heritage Minister Shelly Glover, new Quebec lieutenant Denis Lebel and Quebec City Mayor Régis Labeaume to announce that the city's Gilmour Hill, near the Plains of Abraham, will now be open to traffic year-round instead of closing for the winter months.