

ESTEVAN

Sen. Denise Batters, Q.C.

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Honourable senators, I rise today to bring to your attention the detrimental effects that the collapse of oil prices and the economic downturn have had on communities in my home province of Saskatchewan.

The small city of Estevan, Saskatchewan, is a case in point. Estevan is particularly close to my heart, as this was my husband's hometown, it was where I first practiced law, and where I got married. Estevan is also at the heart of Saskatchewan's economy. It is the "energy capital" of Saskatchewan - a normally bustling, thriving, entrepreneurial place. Many say it is a microcosm of the city of Calgary.

And as in Calgary, the downturn in the oil sector has had a devastating effect on Estevan. Retail services and restaurants are down by about 30%, and hotels are down by 50%. Four restaurants have closed, and the landmark Derrick Hotel has recently shut its doors for good. Traffic patterns in the city have completely changed due to lessened industrial activity.

Most significantly, the people of Estevan are hurting. Unemployment is on the rise and families face an uncertain future. Employment Insurance benefits of those who have lost their jobs are about to run out.

But Estevan is known as the "Sunshine Capital of Canada," and for good reason. Its people are resilient, they are optimistic, and they are hopeful that their oil industry will once again thrive.

And there is hope on that vast Prairie horizon - the Energy East pipeline. It would allow the West's oil resources to flow to Eastern Canada and on to new markets. Communities like Estevan - communities built on hard work and entrepreneurial spirit - would be able to capitalize on these new markets to better weather the current economic slump.

Given the obvious advantages of the Energy East pipeline, one would expect the Trudeau Government to leap at the chance to break ground on this crucial project. And yet, it seems

that this Liberal Government's "sunny ways" campaign doesn't extend to Saskatchewan's communities. In fact, the Trudeau Liberals have practically employed a full-time fog machine as they stall, waffle and obfuscate on the issue. The people of Estevan recognize the Trudeau Government for what it is: all talk and no action – or, as we in the West like to say: All hat and no cattle.

As former MP Peter MacKay wrote in yesterday's National Post, "without access to tidewater, Canada will forever be forced to sell Canadian oil and gas to a limited number of markets at discounted prices." Clearly, this puts the citizens of Estevan, of Saskatchewan, and of Canada at a significant disadvantage.

Honourable Senators, the people of Estevan are industrious. They want to contribute to their communities and their country. They want to hope for a better future. That future lies in the Energy East pipeline. It's time that this Liberal Government started taking their advice on the oil sector from the hard-working people in resource communities like Estevan - people who are the economic engine of this country - rather than Montreal mayor Denis Coderre. The future of Estevan, and the country, depends on it.