

## Myth busting for a better Canadian economy powered by the oilsands



### Q&A with Sanjay Patel, chemical engineer and author, *The Future of Oil*

BY DEBORAH JAREMKO

*For more than a decade, chemical engineer Sanjay Patel has been a process engineering manager supporting the oilsands operations of Suncor Energy Inc. near Fort McMurray. Frustrated by the low level of energy literacy of Canadians, and even his industry peers, Patel researched and published *The Future of Oil: A Straight Story of the Canadian Oil Sands*. The book is being called “the definitive myth buster” on the industry, which runs along the main theme that it’s not about dirty oil or ethical oil, but about the future of oil.*

**Q:** As a technical specialist in the oilsands sector, what drove you to write a book about broader issues facing the industry?

**A:** One of the main reasons for writing this book is education of the people. We have quite a few books published on the Canadian oilsands, but we need something that is based on facts—that was the driving force. I noticed that people who work in the industry [often] do not know enough about this industry, and it is very important that [they] know this industry very well. That way, when they talk to their friends, families and neighbours, they can communicate the issues effectively, once they have the background. My book is sort of a guide.

**Q:** How important is public perception, really, to the future development of the oilsands industry?

**A:** I think it is very important. Without public consent, the growth of this industry could be difficult. We saw that

during White House protests [against] the Keystone XL pipeline and we are seeing similar protests for Northern Gateway as well. We are losing \$20 billion in a year today [because of our lack of diversified markets], and we really don’t know when we are going to resolve this problem. In my opinion, we should have thought about diversifying our market a long time ago. For some reason, I believe that we are always in reactive mode—we are not thinking ahead.

In the immediate future, we have to resolve the issue of market diversification. Right now, if you look at our oil production, it probably is about three million barrels per day, we export about two million barrels per day and we are losing money. We also import about one million barrels per day from other countries, and we are paying higher prices [for that]. It seems that we are one country, but all the provinces are doing their own thing. Part of the problem is that our natural resources are controlled by our provinces, but it has to change. We are not only facing opposition from south

of the border, we are facing opposition from east and west as well. We need some sort of alignment here.

**Q:** One of your key themes is that society does not have to choose between economic prosperity and a healthy environment. What does that mean to you?

**A:** A lot of people think we can either have economy or environmental protection. I don’t think we can make this choice—we need both, actually. Environmental protection is very important, but it is expensive as well. We cannot protect the environment at all costs. We have to make some compromises. If we do too much in terms of environmental protection, then it will impact other areas of the economy, and we don’t want that.

We have to direct our economy in such a way that it can protect our environment as well. We need our economy to function properly so that we can have research and development for development of green initiatives like renewables. **OSR**