

Other voices —

Patience needed on Gasline decision

They're all at it again this week, for the last time Judge Berger, the lawyers, the scribes and the transcribers with their funny speaking cones, playing out the last public act of the Mackenzie Valley pipeline inquiry.

The Inquiry staff and the intervenors—the pipeline companies, the Native and environmental groups, the Chamber of commerce and the Municipalities, are presenting their final arguments.

Perhaps, during the past 22 months of hearings, the intervenors have clarified their views. But, it appears, they have not changed them. As he writes his report, Judge Berger will be faced with the same puzzle that existed when he began his inquiry. The only difference is that the puzzle has become buried under several million words of evidence. There is more information to sift through, but the problem remains the same. How can the meeting of two totally different cultures be managed so that people are not destroyed.

The pipeline companies and the intervenors still are not offering much help. They are still presenting evidence as opponents, so all they say is tainted with the knowledge that it is twisted to serve their own ends.

Arctic Gas says construction of a pipeline will not jeopardize a land claim settlement, the Native groups say that it will.

The Native and environment groups agree with the Inquiry staff that putting the line across the northern Yukon will cause irreparable damage to the people and the environment there. Arctic Gas says that isn't so.

The opposition side says detailed environmental and social guidelines must be written into the permit granting one of the pipeline companies to build the project. The pipeline side says no, most social matters should not even be the concern of the pipeline companies, and the other guidelines must be kept flexible and open to "pragmatic" decision making as the project continues.

The basis disagreement appears to be over timing. Should the project be delayed until northern residents are certain they are prepared to deal with it, and take advantage of it. Or, as Arctic Gas claims, will delay have harmful consequences that will make it impossible for northerners to achieve their aspirations.

The weight of the evidence is in favor of more time, if a pipeline is to be built. Southern Canadians can wait a while longer for the gas. Businesses now operating in the North have survived without a pipeline and can continue to do so. And there will be more opportunities, and less social and political disruption, if we are patient.