Canada is now paying the price for neglecting its relationships with indigenous peoples with its inability to attract a single liquefied natural gas (LNG) terminal despite world-class natural gas reserves, the former chair of the National Energy Board said this week.

“While less controversial than oil terminals or gas pipelines, [these plants] are not without controversy,” Gaetan Caron said in response to a question following a panel discussion on sustainability sponsored by the sustainable energy development graduate program at the University of Calgary. “As a nation, we have 100-and-some years of neglecting our relationships with indigenous peoples and we’re paying the price right now.”

Many of the LNG projects are for Canada’s West Coast, he noted. “I would say the failure, if there is one, is that we have a clunky method of governance when it comes to integrating … indigenous rights and economic and social considerations,” said Caron. “We are far from being reconciled with indigenous people.”

Canada has “lost the ability to make well-reasoned decisions that cause pleasure and displeasure on the part of those affected by those decisions,” he said. “Therefore, political leadership has perhaps been a little lagging, in terms of making a clear ‘yes’ or a clear ‘no’ decision.”

Trump and sustainable energy development

As part of the panel discussion, audience members, many of them current students or graduates of the U of C’s sustainable energy development program, were asked to assess the current United States administration’s impact on sustainable energy development. Much of the ensuing
discussion focused on the “damage” to the U.S. federal bureaucracy responsible for environmental regulation and enforcement since Donald Trump took office earlier this year.

In terms of U.S. federal spending, Trump has cut the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s budget by 31 per cent or US$2.6 billion, said panelist Allan Ingleson, an associate law professor at the U of C. That means there will be roughly 3,200 fewer EPA employees to enforce federal environmental laws, while more than 350 EPA programs are being eliminated, he pointed out.

The budget cuts are in addition to the Trump administration’s decisions to discontinue federal funding for a ‘clean power’ program adopted by former President Barack Obama and to cancel funding for climate change programs.

However, Ingleson also saw signs of dissent within the Trump administration about what steps should be taken towards dismantling the plans adopted by Obama. For example, there are reports that Trump's daughter, Ivanka Trump, is among the dissenting voices although the differences in that respect might be largely generational, he suggested.

David Milia, energy and environmental initiatives director at the university’s Haskayne School of Business, was the moderator for the panel, which also included Adam Goehner, a director of the Delphi Group.