

Stoic and attentive, Baskut Tuncak, the UN special rapporteur on human rights and hazardous substances and wastes, toured the Aamjiwnaang First Nation in Ontario as the skies were turning from sunny to stormy. He stood on the St-Clair River shoreline learning about the 11,000 litres of perchlorethylene, a toxic solvent, that spilled into the waterway from the nearby Dow Chemical factory in August 1985, creating a blob of chemicals the size of a basketball court, and about the elevated concentrations of mercury in sediments found near the fishing docks and the mouth of Talfourd Creek. He heard local banter about how, when you catch a pickerel, best to dangle it by its tail, whack it once or twice, just like an old thermometer, to make sure the mercury falls in the head. He also visited the burial grounds, which are surrounded by the Suncor oil refinery, and was explained the long and cumbersome process of clearing a puzzling benzene spill. The hydrocarbon is a known carcinogen. He was shown just how close the plants are to homes and community facilities, sometimes they even share a fence. During a meet-and-greet, Beze Gray, a twenty year-old two-spirit band member and land defender, hoping to convey how normalized the situation has become, recounted: "I didn't know clouds were natural until 5th grade because I believed they came out of the industries' smokestack. I even argued with my teacher." A few days later, at the end of what was a month-long survey of the country's comportment towards toxins, Tuncak shared his observations: "there exists a pattern in Canada where marginalized groups, indigenous people in particular, find themselves on the wrong side of a toxic divide, subject to conditions that would not be acceptable elsewhere in Canada."

A major contributor to this inequity is the omnipresent oil industry, whose tentacles stretch across the nation. Aamjiwnaang is not an isolated case, but one stop in a long production chain that repeatedly puts Indigenous nations in jeopardy. Upstream is Fort McKay, Fort Chipewyan and Beaver Lake, communities that have to contend with the devastation wrought on the land by the oil sands. Along the way are a number of bands whose territories are intersected by pipelines, or will soon be as proposals for expanded capacity or new routes are green lighted. A day after Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau declared a climate emergency on June 17, 2019, he approved the controversial Trans Mountain Pipeline project which is set to traverse 518 kilometres of the Secwepemc Nation's unceded territory to transport crude oil from Alberta to the West Coast. The irony in these back-to-back announcements barely registers as surprising. In contemporary Canada, it is business-as-usual. Meanwhile, Indigenous Peoples continue to bear a triple burden when it comes to the fossil capitalism that shapes the country. They bear a disproportionate burden of risks to their health, culture and livelihood. They bear the burden of proving the existence of these adverse effects and who is responsible for them. And, they bear the burden of devising and implementing strategies to resist the encroachment of the petroleum complex or, at least mitigate its impacts.

Burden of risk

"We live in a soup of chemicals," notes Danalynn Williams, an Aamjiwnaang band member. For years, she worked in Northern Ontario as a police officer, where she heard stories about water quality

from the local elders. Fearing what could happen to that of her home, she returned with the goal of making a difference. Aamjiwnaang is in the heart of a region that has earned the distressing moniker of “Chemical Valley” because of the high concentration of refineries, petrochemical plants and other energy facilities that operate within the neighbouring cities of Sarnia and Corunna. Initially, the title was claimed with pride, even used as a way to attract tourism. In the seventies, the Polymer Corporation, owned and operated by the State, was so treasured that the Bank of Canada issued a 10-dollar note with an engraving of it. “You feel like a second-class citizen because the government and the industry don’t care about putting us in harm’s way,” reflects Williams over coffee, noting the high incidences of cancers, respiratory illnesses, reproductive disorders, skin rashes, and other health concerns. Alarming in the late nineties and early aughts, research by the universities of Windsor and Ottawa revealed a steadily declining sex birth ratio. Instead of the usual 50-50 split, you had a 35-65 one, in favour of girls. Such discrepancy has been observed in other human and non-human populations exposed to environmental contamination, specifically endocrine-disrupting compounds such as PCBs and dioxins. “For the longest time, we didn’t know what was being released—we still don’t fully—nor what it meant. We only knew the smell,” recalls Aamjiwnaang resident watchdog Ada Lockridge, who keeps a calendar of leaks, spills, high flaring and other incidents, as well as inspires and participates in a number of scientific health studies and reviews. The most recent, a report from Ecojustice, a Canadian environmental law non-for-profit, notes that based on the 2016 data provided by the polluting industries, Sarnia is responsible for 29 percent of the provincial Benzene emissions and 87 percent of the 1,3-Butadiene ones. Both are classified as carcinogens by the World Health Organization.

Cancers are also of concern up the petroleum supply chain, in Fort Chipewyan, a Dene, Cree and Métis community 300km downstream along the Athabasca River from Fort McMurray, the home of the oil sands operations. Dr. John O’Connor, an affable and frank Irishman, who was their on-call physician between 2000 and 2015, is unnerved by the high incidence of bile duct cancers, amongst other diseases. “It usually affects 1 in 200 000 people,” he explains, noting that the statistic includes his father, a personal experience that helped him recognize the otherwise hard to detect condition. “There have been 5 recorded cases in Fort Chipewyan since I started working there, amongst a population of 1200. At the time, 70 percent lived off the land.” He doubts it’s a mere coincidence. Elders and residents told him about the changes they had been noticing: the presence of a thin oil sheen atop the water, recognizable to its rainbow swirl, the decreasing water levels, the deformed fish and their foul taste, the thinning ice. “Around 2000, when the boom happened, we saw scum on the river, an oil spill shut down the fishery, the water levels started to drop, the water got warmer, the ice thinner. All of that started changing our way of life,” enumerates one of them, Alice Rigney. Her personal story is a crash course in Canadian settler-colonialism. Delivered off the shore of the Athabasca River by her grandmother and one of sixteen children, she was raised in Jackfish a lieu-dit that does not appear on maps, speaking only Dene and learning her ancestors’ traditions from her extended family. At age five, she was forcibly taken to residential school. “If I wanted water, I’d have to ask in English, or else I went thirsty,” she recalls. “It

broke me. I started losing my culture. We were zombies, never allowed to speak our minds.” When she made her way to Edmonton, as a young adult, she was met with incessant racism. The discrimination became too much and she left three months before she would have graduated from college, returning to Fort Chipewyan feeling defeated. She began healing when she took a job with the band teaching her mother tongue. In the late eighties, early nineties, with her second husband John Rigney, she opened a tour company, Moose Crossing Wilderness Adventures, proposing a deep dive into the culture, way of life and history of the area, which includes Wood Buffalo National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, as well as hunting and fishing journeys. “We both loved being on the land. That’s why we started doing tourism. We believed we had something beautiful to share with the world,” she says with a smile. “People came from Europe, China, New York, San Francisco, Dallas.”

That was until two years ago. Within the span of a few months, Rigney lost her partner and her son. And, business itself was declining. While the landscape remains awe-inspiring with its meandering river, the land was no longer bountiful. “It’s not the same today. We don’t get visitors anymore. And there are two or three funerals every month,” she remarks. When asked who is responsible, she looks outside of the seafood restaurant in Fort McMurray where we gathered. She juts her chin towards the city that stretches outside the window and whispers: “the oil sands”, before repeating it twice, each time a little louder. Her hush tone is not incongruous. The petroleum extraction complex for which the Alberta government has granted up to 93,000 km square in leases—nearly the size of Hungary—is reminiscent of Mordor, the realm of dark and destruction from Tolkien’s imagination. Most of the mining operations, which strips the land from vegetation and requires the creation of large lifeless tailing ponds, is deliberately hidden from view. Manufactured green hills, or what the industry refers to as reclaimed lands, encircle the properties. Roads in are privatized. The fence line heavily surveilled. To get in requires an invitation, or bold audacity.

Rigney is not the only one to blame the sprawling petroleum complex for changes to the environment that affects Indigenous livelihood. “As the oil sands come closer, it pushes everything away,” remarks Kendrick Cardinal, a Métis from Fort Chipewyan. He prides himself on being a provider for his community, traveling long distances by skidoo during the frigid winter months to hunt caribou. “1956 was the last time caribous came to Fort Chip. Now they’re anywhere from ten to fifteen hours away. They’re moving as far as they can from the pollution. The moss and berries they feed on are no longer around the community,” he explains. “Every year I wonder if I should go. Will my skidoo make it? Will I catch anything? Will I have enough money for it.” Gas and supplies for a simple hunting trip amount to 1500\$, but the excitement, the respect and honour one gets in return, makes it well worth it, and so does the meat harvested which can feed an entire community. By his own account, Kendrick journeyed through a lot in life, growing up in the bush and then having to leave the world he knew for school. He spent time in and out of jail until his thirties when he returned to his homeland and to a more traditional lifestyle. That was his salvation. He suspects it can be too for today’s youth who are struggling within the education system, that is if the land can still sustain them. “As our lifestyle gets taken away from us, we’re slowly

transforming to live the way they [the government] wants us to live. For example, we now have to buy our food, which is full of sugar. I grew up eating what came from the wild," he says. Words that reminds us that food sovereignty is an important part of Indigenous health and self-determination. Endangering the environment through resource extraction, is not merely putting First Nations, Métis and Inuit health in jeopardy, but also the ways of life they've already fought so hard to maintain since colonization that stand as alternatives to unfettered fossil capitalism.

Burden of proof

Despite the grounded observations, the testimonies, and even the recorded health concerns, Canadian institutions and companies routinely dismiss the connection between the changes and the petroleum industry, if they don't outright repudiate the information gathered as incorrect. Jean L'Hommecourt, an august traditional land use researcher in Fort McKay, the Dene community closest to the oil sands, describes it best: "They [the government] put it on us because they have this idea that we won't be able to prove anything because we're not scientists. But we're traditional knowledge holders, we're land users. We don't use the same measurement systems. We learn through observation, through experience, through oral history. Not books, not computers, not documents. And when we do prove it, the government steps in and wipes it off the table. They want to downplay the impacts so that the rest of the world doesn't feel bad about us being sacrificed for them." When they dismiss her and her peers knowledge in such a way, it makes her angry, it's belittling. "I think: how dare you? We are knowledgeable. It's our land."

Case in point: In 2004 and 2005, Ada Lockridge went knocking on the doors of her neighbours in Aamjiwnaang. One by one, she collected information about their family's medical history. "Listening to the stories was hard, especially one after another. I would try not to cry in their home, but as soon as I'd leave, I'd let go. Then I would wipe my tears to move on to the next one," she recalls. Afterwards, four life-sized outlines of bodies were drawn, representing the different demographic: adult male, adult female, boy, girl. Stickers of different size, form and colour stickers were assigned a type of ailment: yellow circles for cancers, orange ones for severe chronic respiratory and sinus problems, yellow rectangles for miscarriages, and so on. For every instance reported, the corresponding sticker would be affixed to the sketched silhouette. The result is visually arresting and also telling. For a population of 850, the health concerns and patterns thus identified are overwhelming. And yet, the enquiry was quickly disregarded, the sample size deemed too small by scientific standards to warrant any conclusions and many blaming the 'lifestyle' of the Anishinabek people. "Why do I have to fight so hard?" asks Lockridge "It shouldn't be up to us to know everything, to prove everything. If anything we should only be raising the alarm. Then it's up to the government to do the research, come back to us and establish the appropriate regulation."

Health professionals can also find themselves in the line of fire. In Alberta, Dr. O'Connor faced what he deems retaliation for speaking publicly about his worries over the rates of cancers and

autoimmune diseases in Fort Chipewyan. In March 2007, he received a letter of complaint from the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta, alleging that he raised undue alarm, withheld information and engendering mistrust. It took two years for him to clear his name. Meanwhile, Health Canada produced a swift report concluding that there was no cause for alarm. In 2009, three years after the initial whistleblowing incident, the Alberta Cancer Board, reviewed the cases of cancer in the community. They found thirty percent more cases than what was expected, that is the number of occurrences that would usually befall a community of that size and demographics. Yet, they were also quick to point out that “The small population size of Fort Chipewyan limits the ability to interpret results”, an echo of what Aamjiwnaang has heard in the past, and that the study was neither designed to determine the cause(s) of the cancers, nor if living in the region elevated risks. Buttressed by these findings, Dr. O’Connor continues to call for an independent comprehensive study. “It needs to take environmental factors seriously and thoroughly alongside other cancer causes, namely lifestyle, genetics and sheer bad luck. The community needs and deserves an answer,” he asserts. None have been undertaken so far by provincial or federal authorities. “I have no trust in Health Canada,” adds the physician-cum-activist, who rather cites research from scientific and academic sources, such as the “Environmental and Human Health Implications of Athabasca Oil Sands” report. Prepared by Stéphane M. McLachlan, PhD. at the University of Manitoba, it reveals high levels of heavy metals such as mercury, cadmium and arsenic, as well as polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs) in the environment to the community’s declining health. Still government officials diminish the claims. In 2014, James Talbot, Alberta’s Chief Medical Officer of Health maintained that there’s little evidence that environmental factors play a role in the incidence of cancers.

All the while, there is little onus put on industry to demonstrate that their processes and the chemicals they use or release do not adversely impact their surroundings. “The precautionary principle has been entirely lost,” insists Dr. O’Connor. In the oil sands as in Chemical Valley, the companies are required to abide by air quality standards set by the provincial entities. Not only do they self-report, they can use a variety of measuring methods to do so, some of which are less rigorous than others. More concerning, is their ability to bend regulations. For instance, the Sarnia petroleum refineries and petrochemical facilities argued that since they could not meet the benzene air quality standards of .45 microgram per cubic meter, they should only be beholden to an industry standard, that is committed to improve technological and process requirements, such as tank upgrades and leak detection improvements. Their request for an exception was granted. Meanwhile, the quantity of benzene recorded by the air monitoring station in Aamjiwnaang was .70 microgram per cubic meter.

Burden of resistance

In the absence of oversight from government entities, Indigenous communities and individuals are taking matters into their own hands, honouring their responsibilities as stewards of the

land. The approaches to hold petroleum companies accountable or mitigate their impacts range from bargaining and capacity-building projects to litigation and protest.

Aamjiwnaang First Nation is employing a twofold approach. Via their environment committee, they are constantly engaged in political advocacy campaigns—as exemplified by their invitation to host the UN special rapporteur—, voicing their concerns and making recommendations to the companies and governmental regulatory bodies. Current demands include access to more financial resources to monitor the industries' activities and to all relevant data, the establishment of a dedicated Ministry of Environment Office in Sarnia instead of a district office miles away, clear performance measures for industry to meet and better enforcement of them. Enabling the companies to self-report is a recipe for omissions. Overall, their requests have aim to increase accountability and reduce procedural and response wait-times. When justice is delayed, the local saying goes, justice is denied. The longer government lingers to update standards or compel industry to clean up spills, the more the environment and those that rely on it suffer. And, in the meantime, Aamjiwnaang is not staying idle. They have developed and supported capacity-building initiatives to improve the physical, spiritual and cultural health of their community. These range from habitat restoration projects to youth and senior programming focused on traditional knowledge transfer and even discussions over the creation of an Anishinabek constitution. Their resolve comes from the knowledge that in this toxic landscape, Aamjiwnaang remains a green lung, a haven for all species.

Take the pickerel derby, organized by Fenton Plain. Started 8 years ago, its aim is to get band members to fish more, like they once used to. He recalls that decades ago, everyone had a dock on the riverfront from which they could cast a line. Over the years, commercial vessel traffic continuously eroded the land, so they had to secure the bank by putting rocks along it, altering the habitat in the process. Last year, the competition was canceled because of new work along the embankment in a bid to restore some of the loss. This is part of a larger conservation project that includes a greenhouse and native plant nursery, as well as initiatives to protect species at risk. “We started by quantifying the animals in the area and identifying the areas of concern as well as the activities that could impact those habitats,” explains Dennis Plain, the Species at Risk technician. “Eventually, we developed a policy mainly addressed to industry so that now when they have to do maintenance on pipeline or energy corridors, they have to do mitigation. The point is not to shut them down. I’m here to make sure that the animals and the plants survive.” Moreover, with the support of the Environment Committee, he’s been transforming 1.53 hectares of family land along the highway into a refuge. He calls his work “enhancement” not rehabilitation because the landscape has been significantly altered from its original state. The creation of roads and industry slowly turned what once was a prairie into more of a wetland. Keeping this new topography in mind, he clears invasive species such as glossy and common buckthorn, downy and common hawthorn, Scots pine, autumn olive, Norway spruce and Manitoba maple, plants native ones that attract local animals and constructs structures especially for them. For instance, to ensure that the Butler Garternakes, which are endangered in Ontario, thrive, over-wintering that provides protection throughout the colder months, hibernaculum to help them reproduce, placed cover-boards under which

they can hide and basking sites where they can regulate their temperature. “It goes way beyond the snakes,” notes Plain who was initially planning to use the land for hunting. “That’s how we got the means and the help. But we moved beyond that. It’s about the health of the environment, the animals and our community.”

As of late, both Aamjiwnaang and the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation (ACFN) have dedicated energy to creating traditional land use studies, demonstrating the relation between members of their communities and different areas of their territory. A crucial way to prevent further encroachment by industry is to demonstrate that the area oil companies seek to disturb is not, as they like to claim, there for the taking. “You can’t fight them if you’re not on the land,” says bluntly Lisa Tssessaze, the director of the Dene Lands and Resource Management, formerly Industry Relations Corporation, for the ACFN. A straight-shooter, she’s been working with the department for the past fifteen years and has participated in most of the responses to the different energy powerhouses’ projects, from Syncrude to Suncor, Canadian Natural Resources Limited, Imperial Oil, Husky and Shell, amongst many others. Often the AFCN deployed their resources and efforts to outright oppose the projects explaining the harmful consequences it would have on the land, their community and the environment at large. However, last year, they signed a participation agreement with Teck Resources Limited, who’s planning the Frontier Project, an operation promising the extraction of 260 000 barrels per day, that would sit just 30km outside ACFN reserve. “You don’t get much out of them if you’re fighting them,” reflects Tssessaze. “And they’ll get the approvals anyway.” Environmental lawyer and professor Dayna Scott concurs: “The reality is the communities don’t have the actual ability to reject those developments. Under Canadian law, the duty to consult and accommodate is interpreted very narrowly. You have to listen to the concerns, but you don’t have to actually heed to them.” Best then to have a seat at the table, impose important conditions and reap financial benefits. The goal here is to develop the means to become a sovereign nation. “If we can become self-sustaining and implement our own green energy plan, then we can get off our dependency on the oil sands,” says the seasoned negotiator. But, to assume ACFN is letting their guards down would be misguided. Tssessaze is particularly concerned about the apparent omertà around the approval for water uses. “What exactly are they approving? How many approvals exist? Who’s is taking water? Where from? Who’s monitoring it,” are some of the questions she’d like to see answered. The Athabasca River and its tributaries are the bloodline of Fort Chipewyan life.

Concerned about the sheer number of industrial exploitation permits approved in their vicinity, the Beaver Lake Cree Nation (BLCN), on the southend of the oil sands, have taken the matter to the courts, making an unprecedented argument. Rather than focus on a single case, BCLN is arguing that the cumulative impacts of the approximately 19,000 individual authorization for fossil fuel projects within their traditional territory, which is about the size of Switzerland, is a profound and direct threat to their way of life. “The current assessment mechanism does not account for the combined consequences of approving multiple industrial projects,” explains Karey Brooks, one of the lawyers advocating for the band. Aamjiwnaang and Fort Chipewyan, are no strangers to the lack of consideration for cumulative impacts.

“By now we have a pretty good sense of what one chemical does to our bodies, but not what all of them together might do,” says Lockridge. And it’s not only about the toxic soup they’re directly exposed to, but the compounded effect of losing your traditional source of food, of seeing your land, to which you hold a unique relationship to, destroyed, of the daily stress that comes from not knowing what is in your air, water and soil, and of no longer being able to perform important cultural traditions or maintain your ancestors’ way of life. Hence, in a lawsuit against the government of Alberta and Canada launched in 2008, BCLN is invoking section 35 of the Constitution Act which recognizes and affirms the existing aboriginal and treaty rights of Indigenous Peoples. What those rights are continue to be debated. In this instance, BCLN is a party to Treaty 6 signed between the Crown and local bands in 1876. It guarantees them the right to hunt, trap, fish and gather medicines in perpetuity throughout their traditional territory. Hence, activities that endanger their ability to do just that are a breach of the agreement made 143 years ago. Their claim is bold and the defendants are fiercely fighting it, using delaying tactics and outspending the Cree nation. “They’ve used every tool in the toolbox that they’re entitled to. They know that if they continue to file strike motion, they’ll exhaust the community’s resources” observes Brooks, who believes this raises important questions about access to justice. “Does the Crown have an obligation to create a litigation that is less adversarial?” At the time of writing, BCLN, which needs about five million dollars to gather and provide a host of evidence it needs to make their case in court, has filed an application to award them in advance a portion of the costs so the trial can go ahead, on the grounds of its precedent-setting nature. “They’re trailblazers,” believes Brooks.

Given how unfavourable the existing regulatory and judicial framework is, many feel like the only option remaining to oppose oil infrastructure is direct action. As new pipelines are proposed, under the claim that without fossil fuel export capacity increases the economy will tank, groups are setting encampments in their way. The stakes cannot be understated. “Both sides of the debate understand that we will lock ourselves in a certain industry if we build the infrastructure,” observes Scott. Since fall 2017, members of the Secwepemc First Nation in British Columbia and allies have built ten tiny houses on the planned route of the Trans Mountain pipeline within the nation’s unceded territory. A similar, yet much smaller, camp exists along Enbridge’s Line 3, a 1,660 kilometres pipeline central to carrying oil from the oil sands to the refineries next to Aamjiwnaang, which is being “replaced”. In this instance, “replacement” means decommissioning the existing fifty years old conduit, which will be left in the ground, and building a new one next to it with a capacity of 760,000 barrels of crude per day (the current one, because of its age runs at half of that and is only used for light products). Even if most of the work within the Canadian portion of the project is complete, Geraldine McManus, a Dakota land defender from Long Plains First Nation in central Manitoba, built a wigwam atop the pipeline corridor on a dirt road that marks the border between Canada and the United States. “It’s not what I planned for my retirement, to sit on a pipeline,” she laughs, “but it’s what was being asked of me from the ancestors.” An organizer at Standing Rock, she set up The Spirit of the Buffalo camp near Gretna, Manitoba in July 2018 as a way to raise awareness about what flows underneath, to bother the Canadian multinational energy transportation company, and

to pray. "Am I accomplishing anything here?" she asks. "Who knows. By doing this I'm showing that we're not complacent. And I pray. I pray that the pipeline does not break or leak. I pray that it will cause no harm. There is currently no oil flowing. It's been delayed multiple times. Did I play a part? I can't say. But I believe strongly in prayer." And it's hard not to when witnessing such a moment. On an overcast evening in early June, her friend Alma Kakikepinace from Sagkeeng First Nation performed a pipe ceremony. As she went on, the sun burst through the clouds to the West, its rays so bright that they shot overhead, still visible when they met the earth to the East. It seemed as if the earth was radiating. A rainbow appeared. Then a second. Two perfect arches straddling the border getting brighter as the two women sang. When they stopped, the skies darkened again. Though it might be coincidence, such a display makes even those without a spiritual bone in their body wonder.

Resource extraction has been a cornerstone in the development of the Canadian settler nation. First, it was fur, then logging, followed closely by the harvesting of water and the exploitation of valuable minerals. At 1.8 trillion Canadian dollars in revenue (1.2 trillion euros), the energy industry alone currently accounts for nearly ten percent of the national GDP. In the process, communities are sacrificed. "Each of the steps involved in the oil extraction and production industry have tended in Canada to have a disproportionate impact on marginalized communities and vulnerable populations," notes Scott who has witnessed and written extensively on the subject. Adjusting the scales would require a dramatic overhaul of the state's regulatory and judicial framework. One such proposal is to enshrine the right to a healthy environment within the constitution. Already, over a hundred countries do so. Canada is not one of them. "It will take a national effort of the same scale as the campaign to establish universal health care," believes Peter Wood, who leads that fight for the David Suzuki Foundation. "In the past decade, we've been on a rollercoaster of environmental regulations. We've seen how a decade of mild progress in legislation can be undone with the stroke of a pen, and how hard it to regain it afterwards." The events of mid-June are a good case in point. After the approval of the fiercely opposed Trans Mountain pipeline, the Canadian Senate passed bill C-48, which places a moratorium on oil tankers carrying more than 12 500 metric tons of crude oil or persistent oil from the north coast of British Columbia's, and bill C-69, which promises to strengthen the impact assessment process of industrial projects. To many Indigenous land and water defenders, these mixed signals register as merely symbolic. "We can't keep guessing standards and accommodating industry," says Beze Gray. "It's time to start accommodating our community. We're the priority."