**Bill S-229 Introduced in the Senate**

There is an entire invisible world of underground infrastructure that delivers and transports energy, television, telecommunications, water and sewage all across our country. It is a web of wires, pipes, fibre optics and oil and gas pipelines that are at the very root of our quality of life and our standard of living.

This fall, after extensive consultations with stakeholders, I introduced Bill S-229 - *An Act respecting underground infrastructure safety* in the Senate. This bill addresses the need for a comprehensive, rigorous damage-prevention system built around notification centres across the country. Such a system is essential to avoid tremendous risks and costs related to damage to our underground infrastructure caused far too frequently by those who dig before they find out what is beneath their feet.

Bill S-229 will significantly enhance the integrity of critical underground infrastructure falling within federal purview by establishing requirements for participation by excavators and infrastructure owners in damage prevention programs and protocols.

The bill will:

* Require operators of underground infrastructure that is federally regulated or on federal land to register that infrastructure with a notification centre;
* Require people who are planning to dig to first make a “locate request” with the relevant notification centre; and
* Require operators of underground infrastructure to respond to locate requests by locating or marking the ground, providing a clear description of the location of the underground infrastructure in the vicinity of the proposed excavation, or providing an all clear to proceed with excavation.

To be sure, this bill will not cover the entire underground infrastructure in the country. The rest falls under provincial and territorial jurisdiction. However, it will cover a significant amount of underground infrastructure, that which is on federal lands or regulated under federal jurisdiction. This federal initiative can contribute to momentum for a national system. It is an opportunity for positive, collaborative national leadership that is clearly in the common interest.

The bill will be meaningfully enforced by virtue of a series of penalties and enforcement clauses that are designed to channel resources to educate and promote safety and awareness to Canadians on the hazards of uncontrolled excavations as well as the merits of safe digging.

Bill S-229 represents the kind of positive public policy that is in some senses unique, as it significantly reduces societal, economic and business costs, and it will enhance public safety, which will be done at no appreciable cost to governments. At a time when pipeline safety is being widely debated, public confidence remains essential to achieving the social licence required to permit new pipelines to be built. It will contribute to that.