

Speaking notes for news conference responding to the tabling of the *Sustainable Jobs Act*

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(Check against delivery)

Today is a very good day for workers, both here in Alberta and across Canada.

It's a good day because, with the introduction of the *Sustainable Jobs Act*, workers will finally have a seat at the table.

Usually, all of the big economic decisions that affect the jobs and livelihoods of workers are made exclusively by the rich and powerful.

They're made by big, faceless corporations.

They're made by billionaire owners.

They're made by deep-pocketed investors, who live thousands of kilometers away from where the work actually gets done.

Or they're made by politicians – who are often beholden to those same corporations, billionaires, and investors.

Workers are the last people these fat-cats think of when they're making their decisions.

And the fat-cats like it that way.

That's why this bill is such a welcome departure from business as usual in Canada.

It acknowledges that workers, indigenous people and other members of civil society have an important stake in the outcome of big economic decisions – and it says ordinary citizens deserve to have a say in those decisions.

By itself, this move to invite more people to the decision-making table is notable.

But it is particularly significant in the context of the unfolding global energy transition.

Big change isn't just coming – it's already here.

We can either prepare for that change, or be run over by it.

Despite what people like Danielle Smith and other members of the UCP might tell you, this Bill is not about shutting down the Alberta economy – it's about preparing us for a future that's going to look different than our past.

That's why we in the Alberta labour movement endorse this legislation.

Like the majority of our fellow Albertans, we think it's better to prepare for change and prosper by seizing new opportunities than it is to stick our heads in the sand and run the risk of being left behind.

We also endorse the *Sustainable Jobs Act* because we helped write it.

Two years ago, after the last federal election, the Alberta Federation of Labour formed a coalition with unions representing Alberta workers in oil and gas; oil and gas related construction; and oil and gas related manufacturing.

Through this coalition, we went to the federal government and said five things.

First, we said that the focus of government policy in the energy transition has to be on job creation.

Second, we said that, like our American cousins, we need to embrace government-led industrial policy to create those jobs and pivot the economy towards new opportunities.

Third, we said our governments, both at the federal and provincial levels, have to put their money where their mouth is. Billions, not millions, will be needed to lower emissions in oil and gas and to seize new opportunities beyond oil and gas.

Fourth, we said public money should come with strings attached. In particular, we said companies receiving incentives should be required to commit to creating not just any jobs, but good jobs at good wages and with good training.

Finally, we said that workers are going to build these projects and run them – so they need a seat at the table. Right from the beginning. And not as an afterthought.

I'm happy to report that with the introduction of this Bill, we've checked off almost everything on our list.

At our behest, the federal government agreed to replace the name Just Transition with the more appropriate name, Sustainable Jobs.

They agree to focus their policies on job creation, not just labour market adjustment.

They agreed to embrace the idea of Industrial Policy, similar to the *Inflation Reduction Act*, the *Infrastructure Act* and the *Chips Act* in the US.

They also came through in the budget. \$80 billion over ten years has been earmarked for incentives for projects that will create tens of thousands of jobs. And strings have been attached, strings to make sure the jobs created will be good jobs.

The final piece of the puzzle is the *Sustainable Jobs Act*. They are giving workers and civil society a seat at the table, just as we asked.

This isn't an agenda being imposed on Alberta by outsiders from Ottawa. It's a framework developed, in large part, by workers and unions from right here in Alberta – in consultation with the federal government, and with input from other important

Alberta stakeholders, including the business community and even the oil and gas industry itself.

The UCP government, first under Jason Kenney and then under Danielle Smith, chose not to participate in the consultations that led to the budget commitments and this legislation. They chose instead to politicize the issue and demonize anyone who suggested that we prepare for the future instead of sticking our heads in the sand.

The good news is that many other Albertans stepped up and filled the vacuum created by the UCP's absence – and the budget commitments and this legislation are the result.

My hope is that now, with the provincial election behind her, Premier Smith will come to the table in good faith and join the many other Albertans who have been trying to work with the federal government to help prepare our province for the future.

But I want to make a few things very clear – if and when the UCP does start to engage, they had better not try to mess with the strings that have been attached to these incentives.

They had better not oppose the need for government-led industrial policy to pivot our economy towards new opportunities.

And, perhaps most importantly, they had better not try to remove workers and other civil society representatives from the decision-making table.

The UCP may have their lines in the sand – but those are ours.

I want to conclude this morning by saying two final things.

First, for those who say we must defend our economy at all costs – we say that the best way to ACTUALLY defend our economy is to skate to where the puck is going, not to where it has been.

There are so many opportunities presenting themselves in the global energy transition. Our future prosperity depends on us seizing those opportunities, not letting them pass us by.

Second and finally, I want to respond to those who accuse the AFL and Alberta unions of not standing up for Alberta industry.

My response is that it's not our job to stand up for industry – especially industries that increasingly discard workers like Post-It-Notes, even as they make record profits.

Instead, it's our job to defend the interests of Alberta workers. And it's clear to us that the best way to defend those interests is to push for emissions reductions and product diversification within the oil and gas industry and for aggressive investment in industries beyond oil and gas. That's where the jobs and our future prosperity lie.

This legislation gives us a year and a half to come up with a Sustainable Jobs Plan for Canada and Alberta. Based on everything we know about the unfolding energy transition, we at the AFL think that the problem in the next 10 or 20 years won't be lost jobs but finding enough people to do all the work.

If we can put the petty politics aside, I'm confident that we'll be able to get big things done. Let's not miss this opportunity.

At this point, I'd be happy to answer any questions you might have about our response to the legislation.