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The 30th Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday morning, October 15, 2019

Day 27

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature

First Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

10 a.m.

Tuesday, October 15, 2019

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: Good morning, everyone. I hope you had a wonderful Thanksgiving weekend.

Prayers

The Deputy Speaker: Let us pray. Lord, the God of righteousness and truth, grant to our Queen and her government, to Members of the Legislative Assembly, and to all in positions of responsibility the guidance of Your spirit. May they never lead the province wrongly through love of power, desire to please, or unworthy ideals but, laying aside all private interests and prejudices, keep in mind their responsibility to seek to improve the condition of all. So may Your kingdom come and Your name be hallowed. Amen.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

The Chair: I'd like to call the Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 14

Alberta Indigenous Opportunities Corporation Act

The Chair: Are there any members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for . . .

Mr. Eggen: Edmonton-North West.

The Chair: Thank you.
. . . the great riding of Edmonton-North West.

Mr. Eggen: Yes. Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to speak on the Alberta Indigenous Opportunities Corporation Act, Bill 14. Certainly, our party, the Official Opposition, does support this very meaningful work towards reconciliation. We also believe, of course, that each of these things that we do here in the Legislature must contribute to the larger work of supporting reconciliation towards Alberta's indigenous communities.

We know that economic opportunities for indigenous communities in Alberta are absolutely essential. To make that investment now and in the future is a very important part of creating growth and meaningful economic opportunity in rural areas, and it's a good idea, I think, especially with, particularly, the energy industry.

We know that it's important to make sure that we have transparency, when we build this bill to become law, every step along the way, and it's important to remind ourselves every step of the way that we must make sure that we are dealing with this on a nation-to-nation basis and that indigenous leaders and membership, indeed all community members, must have real and demonstrable power in the oversight of whatever economic opportunities the corporation might create.

I think we know that with the current tools that we have available to us, we must not discount those, by any means. The aboriginal business investment fund, I think, for example, provides capital to indigenous and community-owned businesses, and this has done

good work in regard to the forestry sector, the service industry, the financial and agriculture sectors as well. We also have the Alberta aboriginal economic partnerships program – right? – which, again, needs to be buttressed and strengthened every step of the way. There is the First Nations development fund, which is a way by which you can develop economically as well, and, you know, there are other mechanisms as well.

I think that, you know, we need to remind ourselves of where capital does come from every step of the way here in this Legislature, and it's important to remind ourselves of the importance of ensuring we have sufficient funding for these sorts of initiatives. Again, I think it's not lost on anyone here in the House or across Alberta that by making a significant, \$4.5 billion corporate tax cut to our bottom line here in the budget, each initiative that we might move forward here, be it in regard to the Indigenous Opportunities Corporation Act or to education, health care, and so forth, is undermined or jeopardized by a lack of adequate funds from the provincial budget to support that.

You know, always we're here to be constructively critical, Madam Chair, and ultimately, if you don't have sufficient cash flow into the government in terms of the budget, then each of these initiatives, including this one, could be left in jeopardy.

You know, I think that there are lots of First Nations that are very interested in developing opportunities around, especially, the energy sector. We know that we had a great uptake, our government, in regard to First Nations renewable energy initiatives. I just hope that this doesn't get lost in the transition to this new government. I think we found that just naturally and, I suppose, with a sense of conscience around developing sustainable energy industries here in the province of Alberta that many First Nations and Métis leaders were drawn to and were very interested in renewable energy initiatives – right? – which I think we saw bear fruit in solar programs across the province as well as other potential.

We don't want to lose any of those things. We must look at this as a whole. Certainly, our energy industry is the backbone of our economy here in the province of Alberta, and we as the Official Opposition look to keep it that way – right? – to make sure that we have the funds and the initiative for everyone to prosper here in the province of Alberta.

The Alberta Indigenous Opportunities Corporation Act, Bill 14, is certainly something I do support. It's an important way by which to help to work with First Nations on a nation-to-nation basis to ensure prosperity for the future, and I look forward to seeing the details of this bill as it becomes an act and the regulations that will support it.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul.

Mr. Hanson: Well, thank you very much, Madam Chair. I'm very happy to hear that the opposition is going to support Bill 14 and that we can move forward on the Alberta Indigenous Opportunities Corporation Act, a very important act. As I said in my previous speech, I believe during second reading, there's a common theme that I heard all across the province over the last four years. A lot of opportunities out there, a lot of commitment to communities that wanted to get involved: regardless of whether it was forestry or the oil and gas industry, the common theme I heard out there was just a lack of access to capital.

You know, I look at the example of the Primco Dene group up in Cold Lake First Nation and what they've done with access through the First Nations development fund and the casinos up there. We can see that they've gotten into the oil and gas industry. They're

very, very well situated up there in that. Hotels: of course, they've got the casino up there. Since then they've also gotten a gas station right up there at the casino as well as some service bays in Cold Lake, restaurants in Cold Lake. They've really diversified and given opportunities to their community just by having that access to capital, so I'm really looking forward to what we can see coming forward in the years to come.

Again, I'd like to thank the minister for acting on this so quickly. I mean, we're only about five months into our mandate, and this is something that was very important. I think it was brought up when we were having discussions before with the campaign, and I'm really glad to see another positive promise made and a promise kept as well. Again, thank you, Minister, for that.

All the indigenous leaders that I've talked to are very, very committed to their communities and looking for opportunities. I think that this Bill 14 will provide access to funds for those communities, especially the remote ones that don't, you know, have access to the bingos or a community that could even support that. I really look forward to what we can bring forward in the future, and I hope that we see some really positive access to this and some fantastic companies. I know that there are some really good entrepreneurs out there that are waiting for this, and, like I said, I look forward to seeing it. Again I thank the minister for that.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. minister of economic development and trade.

10:10

Ms Fir: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's a true pleasure to rise today to speak to Bill 14, the Alberta Indigenous Opportunities Corporation Act. I want to commend my colleague the Minister of Indigenous Relations for his profound and unceasing advocacy for economic development in indigenous communities and for his tireless work in his portfolio. The constituents of Maskwacis-Wetaskiwin are lucky to have him representing them not just in this Chamber but also at the cabinet table. He's a stalwart proponent of the indigenous peoples in our province.

Alberta finally has a government that understands that when indigenous communities benefit from the responsible development of our natural resources, the entire province benefits. I had the privilege just a few weeks ago to attend, with several of my colleagues and the Minister of Indigenous Relations, an event where he and the Premier signed a protocol agreement with the Blackfoot Confederacy. The Blackfoot Confederacy includes three First Nations in southern Alberta that together have more than 22,000 members. As the Premier said at the signing of the protocol agreement: our government is focused on building a true partnership with indigenous peoples through shared prosperity; this agreement will formalize how we build success together.

This historic agreement had many topics of co-operation listed, and one of them was economic development. Those two words are of tremendous importance to me, not merely because they make up half of my ministry title but because they are of huge importance to our government's mandate and, in this case, to the creation of shared prosperity between our government and indigenous communities across the province.

Through economic development Albertans can see prosperity, yes, but it is also through growing the economy that we fund our government's programs. Without economic development – and we see this in many jurisdictions, not just in Canada or North America but across the world – without the natural growth of an economy, our beloved health care, education, and social programs are not possible. The roads that we drive on, the hospitals we attend, the

fountains outside the Legislature: they are all powered by economic growth. Through economic development we can bring prosperity to all Albertans. Economic development for indigenous communities means that we will be equal partners in prosperity, where the growth that comes from Alberta's economy is enjoyed by all of those who live there.

Before I speak directly on the Alberta indigenous opportunities corporation, I want to speak of the crucial importance of economic development in indigenous communities. At the signing of the Blackfoot protocol agreement I spoke to a young man excited about his plans and his vision for a tourism business in his community. In my meetings with business leaders across the province I have been told of the tremendous potential in indigenous communities and how government can, through co-operation and partnerships, play a part in building prosperity for indigenous Albertans.

There is tremendous potential for tourism in indigenous communities. Many communities are eager to share their culture and their history with the world. These communities are unique within the realm of human experience and indeed in the history of our planet, and we need to partner with communities who wish to share their experience with the rest of humanity. There are profound and inspirational stories that will spread the tremendous history of indigenous Albertans and showcase their truly exceptional culture to visitors from around the globe if we can only harness the entrepreneurial and innovative spirit that is already present in indigenous communities. Those partnerships are just waiting to be formed, and we today are discussing legislation that will lead to partnerships of a similar potential, the harnessing of natural resources for the benefit of all.

The Alberta indigenous opportunities corporation will make it easier for indigenous communities and organizations that want to participate in natural resources development to access funding. That is a critical part of economic development. Accessing funding is often a barrier for indigenous communities, and through this legislation we are providing a pathway to do that.

As the Minister of Indigenous Relations said in first reading of this legislation, this government has committed to walk a path of economic reconciliation with indigenous peoples. Many indigenous communities have inhabited their lands for thousands of years, and they want to benefit from the wealth generated from that land. Indigenous peoples have long been innovators and entrepreneurs in their communities. Their culture and their communities have been a part of the very fabric of Alberta for millennia. The Alberta indigenous opportunities corporation is a profound demonstration of how dedicated our government is to partnering with them. The reserving of \$1 billion, promised in our election platform, to partner with indigenous communities is a derivation of the natural resources across our province.

Our government has put a great deal of preparation into this legislation. There were 89 indigenous participants in the engagement sessions. Business leaders such as Syncrude, Suncor, ATCO, and EPCOR and industry associations such as the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers and the Canadian Heavy Oil Association took part. Coalition representatives from Eagle Spirit Energy, First Nations Major Projects Coalition, Project Reconciliation, Iron Coalition, Western Indigenous Pipeline Group, and the Fort McKay Mikisew Cree tank farm project all participated. This is a prestigious list, and it shows that our government is serious in making the Alberta indigenous opportunities corporation an effective undertaking. But even that was not the extent of the consultation. Minister Wilson met with nearly 200 indigenous business and finance leaders on the establishment of the Alberta indigenous opportunities corporation.

Time and time again indigenous communities have been unable to share in the prosperity of Alberta's natural resource economy. It is time to move past words and move into action. That is why we are moving boldly and decisively to bring forward this legislation within mere months of forming government. The legislation is emblematic of our government's vision: bold, common-sense, and with a laser focus on creating prosperity for all Albertans. What has historically been an inability for indigenous groups to provide adequate security to financial lenders has been a significant barrier to their ability to access capital and, therefore, develop the capacity to develop or invest in major resource projects. Some communities have been able to do so, but others have not. The indigenous opportunities corporation will bridge that gap.

For too long all of the debate around the energy industry and indigenous communities has focused on the negativity and the conflict, yet that is only a tiny minority of the true conversation. So many different indigenous communities want to be partners in responsible resource development, and some have already done so. We have the Frog Lake Energy Resources Corporation, which produces 2,000 barrels a day of crude oil. The Fort McKay First Nation purchased a 34 per cent stake in a major Suncor oil tank farm.

Those are just a few examples, but they highlight that there is tremendous potential for further partnerships, and we can build and increase the momentum to a new height, where indigenous communities can become the real owners of major energy projects. We will not get pipelines built or our energy to market if we do not have strong relationships with our indigenous peoples.

After our government hosted the first cabinet-indigenous meeting in five years, Treaty 6 Grand Chief Wilton Littlechild said, and I quote, it is possible to have sustainable development and promote respect for Mother Earth at the same time. I think from our experience the answer is yes. Treaty 8 Grand Chief Arthur Noskey said: working relationships and this billion-dollar fund to backstop investments for First Nations to have their foot in the door and the economic benefits of Alberta, that was ideal thinking for us.

Madam Chair, there is clearly a desire for strong support for this initiative among indigenous leadership, and our government is certainly putting action to words with this legislation. Sustainable development and respect for our planet: this is a message that indigenous Albertans have been speaking about since time immemorial, but it is also the biggest part of the national debate happening right now. We see opposing forces clashing over those two concepts on a monthly, daily, and even hourly basis, but it can be done. Indigenous peoples have done so throughout their history. We should not only listen to them but also reach out and form new relationships in the name of doing just that. When indigenous peoples thrive, Alberta thrives. Through mutual respect, through strong relationships we can create a lasting and cohesive Alberta that will enshrine prosperity for all in the spirit of entrepreneurship that has been emblematic of the inhabitants of this land for thousands of years.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I'd just like to take what may be one of the final opportunities to speak to this while it's in committee. In the past we have talked about our desire to be co-operative and supportive of the government in their plan to move forward on economic development with the indigenous communities as, indeed, we did in many different ways when we were sitting on the other side of the House. We were very pleased

to be working with economic development in terms of green energy projects; for example, \$50 million a year under our indigenous climate leadership plan, that was accessed by all 48 First Nations and all eight Métis settlements and provided jobs, well, in fact, in every single one of those communities, at least a job or two, and then, of course, many other jobs as they developed incredibly strong solar panel companies and house assessment companies and those kinds of things.

10:20

We were very pleased to work with the indigenous community in economic development, and we're very discouraged to see that this present government has decided to cancel those kinds of economic development pieces for the indigenous community. We were also very pleased to be working with the indigenous community in terms of our renewable energy electricity programs, wherein in the second round of the REP there was a requirement that indigenous communities have a minimal capital investment of 25 per cent of the project. As a result, we had three First Nations communities in the province of Alberta who were able to get invested in significant renewable energy projects – the Blood Tribe in southern Alberta in Treaty 7; the Paul band in Treaty 6; and, of course, Sawridge in Treaty 8 – where they were able to contribute to the electricity market here in the province of Alberta, where they were able to expand our renewable energy programs in the province of Alberta. Again, I'm a bit discouraged to see that there is no commitment on the part of the government at this particular time to help indigenous communities in that avenue of economic development.

I guess I just want to speak to some of the things that we heard just now from the Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Tourism. While we agree with the intent here of helping the indigenous community, the actions of the government so far, up until this bill came into the House, have been exactly the opposite of the intention of this bill, removing economic opportunities for indigenous communities. We actually had a demonstrated positive effect in terms of creating jobs and creating economic development in indigenous communities. So when we have a successful program that is fulfilling the intent of this particular bill, why would you undermine all of that?

I know that the Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Tourism mentioned a number of things that made her very proud. I was curious to hear that she was very proud of them as almost all of the things that she mentioned are things that were accomplished during the previous government. I'd like to take just a moment to reiterate some of those things for the record, to demonstrate, indeed, that the government of the NDP was, in fact, very successful in creating economic development in indigenous communities. But we were not limited in where the economic development could be created, as this present government is. We indeed had a broader, more expansive definition of success, not a narrow one that forced indigenous communities to get in line with a narrow objective of the current government.

Let me mention a few of the things that she did speak about. For example, she talked about the Blackfoot protocol agreement, which she was very pleased to attend with the Minister of Indigenous Relations, and how profound that was for her. I want to remind her that it was, in fact, our government that created the Blackfoot protocol agreement. We're very pleased to see that this is one piece that you're continuing. I'd like to thank the Minister of Indigenous Relations for seeing the good work that had been done by the previous government and continuing that.

I notice that in referring to her conversation with a gentleman at the Blackfoot protocol agreement signing that occurred earlier in the year, she indicated in that discussion that there were great

opportunities for tourism, of course something she'd be interested in as that's part of her mandate in her portfolio. However, I also want to note that last week this government defeated a motion that would allow indigenous communities that are interested in tourism to use these dollars. So here she is standing up and saying how great this particular bill is, and then she actively votes against the possibility of creating the economic development projects that she was specifically asked to champion in the House by someone at the protocol agreement she attended with such pleasure. You know, it just seems contradictory to me – I'm sort of caught off guard – that this government would act to defeat their own intention, that the minister would stand up and talk about her excitement at the potential and then act to defeat it by voting against it. Those kinds of things confuse me in terms of their thinking around these things.

I would really like this government to reconsider, before we go into the final third reading on this bill, the potential of having indigenous communities themselves have the ability to define how this bill would most help them. If you go to the indigenous communities and say to them, without constricted controls such as "you can only invest in resource development," but rather say to them, "How is it that you would like your communities to develop?" you will find that they're very interested in a very wide range of economic development opportunities.

There are people within the indigenous communities that are capable in every single field that is available to every other Albertan, people that would love to see some expansion in terms of manufacturing, people that would love to see retail sales, people that would love to see projects that not only help with economic development but help with the internal development of their nations such as grocery stores where food is readily available and prices are kept under control, as we were able to help fund in the Blood Tribe and O'Chiese and Fort Chip under our previous government's work.

Those are the kinds of things that came forward and they were asking for. Now suddenly none of that matters. That concerns me deeply, and I don't know why the government would work around them.

The other thing that hasn't been mentioned here is the second half of responsible development in the oil and gas industry. Now, the Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Tourism just said that she heard Grand Chief Willie Littlechild say that the appropriate development of our natural resources is completely possible, and it can be done in an environmentally respectful and appropriate manner. All I hear in this bill is about the development, nothing about the other half of that: the development in an appropriate and environmentally respectful manner. Nothing in here helps the indigenous communities who want to make sure that as these projects develop, they will be appropriately consulted and have the opportunity to speak to those pieces of development in a way that reflects their values, not just simply the value of developing the resource but doing so in a way that is good for the environment and good for their communities.

A lot of work has been done previously in terms of enhancing the consultation policies for First Nations people. In fact, we increased the amount of monies available for First Nations from \$7 million to \$27 million in the last year. I am hoping that when the budget comes out, we'll of course see that money continue. But I also know that there were about 14 recommendations about other mechanisms that could be used to enhance First Nations' ability to speak to resource development through the consultation process, yet we haven't heard a word from this government about the renewal of the consultation policies. I'd like to see that because if, as Grand Chief Willie Littlechild says, two things can happen at once, resource development and protection of the environment, why is this

government only speaking to resource development and not speaking to protection of the environment?

It seems to me that what we're seeing in this bill is a good intention but made narrow by a very narrow vision of society and a very narrow vision of the future; that is that the First Nations people can participate only if they jump onboard with the gung-ho development of oil and gas resources. Now, we know this to be true, and not only have they brought in this bill, but they've also designed a fund of \$10 million for litigation, which will allow First Nations who are developing resources to sue First Nations who are trying to protect the environment.

10:30

Now, I've had a number of phone calls from indigenous people in the community who are saying that it is quite clear what is happening here. This government is trying to pit First Nations against First Nations, indigenous communities against other indigenous communities. They're doing that by enhancing the ability to develop and build the economic potential in the resource sector and doing everything possible to quash the very important value, as mentioned moments ago by the Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Tourism, of protection of the environment. She heard half of what Grand Chief Willie Littlechild had said and acted on half of what he said and completely ignored the other half.

This is my last chance to seek from the government the consideration of actually changing this bill before we go into third reading to allow different kinds of development and to bring forward a bill that would enhance consultation and the protection of the environment. If indeed you believe what it is that you're being told by the indigenous community, which I kind of hope you do, I would like to see action by this government in pursuit of that set of values. Right now we're not seeing that. We're seeing a government who is trying to co-opt indigenous participation in their own agenda and limiting indigenous voices whenever the indigenous voice does not suit their agenda. That's something that's simply not acceptable.

Thank you.

The Chair: Are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Chair. It gives me great pleasure to be able to stand today. You know, we just finished having a weekend of Thanksgiving, and I hope that all of you had a good Thanksgiving weekend. It sort of got me thinking a little bit that one of the things that we can be giving thanks for is Bill 14. I want to thank the minister personally for his vision and for his willingness to move forward in action on that vision. This bill is in many ways unprecedented in the history of Canada and Alberta, and because of its bold vision, I think that we can say that we are grateful and thankful for the opportunity. That's what Albertans really want, I believe, in life: the opportunity to try and succeed, the opportunity to use our skills and our capacities and our abilities to move forward and to create a better life for Albertans and for our families. I believe that this bill helps us to do that.

Indigenous communities will be able to own and invest in natural resource development, and that has the capacity to change lives. That has the capacity to change communities. It's something that has my wholehearted support and that I believe will move us forward as a province and as a community. Madam Chair, this allows our First Nations peoples and Albertans in general to be able to become true commercial partners in the industry that is perhaps the foundation, to this point in our history, of this province. The

United Conservative Party stands up, as we have every single time, for the responsible development of our natural resources, and this allows us to continue to do that. These loan guarantees and other financial tools will allow us to continue to responsibly develop the natural resources and create the vibrant communities that are capable of providing for their families and for the community in general. This is going to be up and running by around the spring of 2020. I just know that in my communications with the First Nations that are in my constituency, they're very excited about Bill 14.

Mr. Minister, there's nothing better in life than having the capacity to dream and to vision and to provide hope as you can see a path forward, and that's what I think is the heart of this bill. It provides a vision and a hope for a path forward. I'm just going to give you one quick example, and then I'm going to sit down. We've had conversations with a company in my constituency about partnering and using this program to have the first program of its kind in the world, which is a deep-well, continuous-loop geothermal electrical project. When we outline the potential and the vision for some of the First Nations to buy into something like this, to sit down with the board that's going to be struck and that's going to be looking at the business propositions, they get excited about this, a company that they could own that's going to provide carbon-free electricity that they can either sell onto the grid or that they could use, as we're going to suggest that they use, for a greenhouse operation on their own lands using abandoned wells and making them produce again, this time with electricity.

Now, we'll see if that vision and that hope go through, and we'll see if we can put that business plan together and work with them, but it provides a conversation. It provides hope. It provides a vision. It provides a way forward for them to be able to provide the jobs they need for their community, to provide the hope that they need for their community. They're excited, we're excited, and I just want to say thank you to the minister for bringing this bill forward.

The Chair: Are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to be able to rise and speak in favour of Bill 14 today. I think the Member for Edmonton-North West was right on point starting off, when we're talking about moving towards reconciliation, that we need to do everything we can to rebuild that relationship, including things like simply recognizing treaties, something that I've seen, unfortunately, fall off here since the new government has come in. So the opportunity to rise right here in the heart of Treaty 6 to discuss this bill is, I think, very, very important.

When I'm looking at this bill, there are a couple of items that I'm a little bit, I guess, disappointed around. I don't want to get into a lot of the details. I think the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford got into them quite well. When we're talking about a bit of the narrow focus of the opportunities that are being provided to our indigenous peoples in terms of investment, I think we should be able to promote a wide range of ideas, of thoughts, and of opportunities rather than simply a rather limited scope in terms of what we're looking at. I think the member said that it's most important for them to decide what is going to work best in each of their communities, and we have to be able to enable those opportunities. I think, unfortunately, we're missing that piece out of this bill to enable them to look at many different opportunities, not just in the natural resources, not just in our oil and gas but anywhere from renewable energies, manufacturing, anything along those lines. I really wish we could have seen some language around that, but as I said, I am in support.

I guess, you know, thinking back on my time in the labour world, one of the things we used to say was: sometimes some language is

better than no language. So I'm looking at this as an opportunity to, at the very least, use this as a springboard to move on to bigger and better opportunities for our indigenous peoples. I'm also a little disappointed around a lack of language around the board membership. I highly think that we should have had that board consisting of a membership of, at the bare minimum, at least half because they're the ones that live in these communities. Our indigenous peoples are the ones that know what will work best for them, and we have to seek that knowledge, that input at every opportunity. That's what reconciliation is all about, something that I think the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford and former Indigenous Relations minister took to heart, I think, not only each and every day but every second of those days that he was minister.

When I look at things like a \$4.5 billion corporate handout yet we're only getting a mere \$24 million for our indigenous peoples, I think that's a bit of a disservice. We should be looking to invest those dollars right here at home within our own communities and, again, providing those opportunities that they feel are best suited for them.

10:40

Like I said, I think the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford said it very well. I do support Bill 14. I hope this will be a springboard for, you know, greater opportunities for indigenous peoples. I will thank the Minister of Indigenous Relations for bringing this forward. I hope that in that spirit of reconciliation you will continue to allow those opportunities to grow from what we hear from the communities, not just what we think that we're hearing.

Again, I appreciate the opportunity, Madam Chair, to be able to speak to this.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to the bill?

Seeing none, are you ready for the question?

[The remaining clauses of Bill 14 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Any opposed? Carried.

Bill 15

Real Estate Amendment Act, 2019

The Chair: Are there any speakers to the bill?

Shall I call the question?

[The clauses of Bill 15 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Any opposed? Carried.

The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mrs. Savage: I move to rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bills: Bill 14 and Bill 15.

The Deputy Speaker: Having heard the motion, does the Assembly concur in the report? All those in favour, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Speaker: Any opposed, please say no. So carried.

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 14

Alberta Indigenous Opportunities Corporation Act

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to move third reading of Bill 14, the Alberta Indigenous Opportunities Corporation Act.

We have moved swiftly through debate on this bill, in part because we're all elected officials and we know what it means to want the best for the communities that we represent. It is for this reason we ran for office in the first place. We don't take jobs like this just for the hours. I, like many of my colleagues, saw too many of our friends and neighbours struggling to get by. Alberta's economic downturn put a lot of hard-working people out of work and out of luck. For me, their stories became my rallying cry to get involved in government so I could try to change the outcome for them. Everyone wants a chance at a happily ever after, Madam Speaker, and I believe that being a good steward of the public trust means working hard for every Albertan to have their chance.

Through debate in this Chamber we have heard many passionate stories about indigenous people and their struggles for their economic security. However, it's best to hear directly from some of the most respected First Nations and Métis leadership in the province. Like Chief Billy Morin of the Enoch said during our AIOC Act announcement last week: this is needed for First Nations, for treaty people, but we're also Albertans; this is Alberta, and Alberta is known for its oil and gas, and that's what's going to keep us going forward. Or the words from Chief Joseph Weasel Child of Siksika Nation: we've always been told, since the time of treaty, that we're going to be given the tools to make us more self-sufficient, and that has never happened, but now, after this election, we're really excited.

Madam Speaker, we need to remember that indigenous communities are our neighbours. Their success is our success, and the jobs they create boost Alberta's economy. The projects they invest in bring new revenue to their communities so that they can take care of the socioeconomic projects that they need, and they want to be part of the industries that can bring them prosperity.

I mentioned briefly in my earlier speech, last week, the incredible success story of the Whitefish (Goodfish) First Nation and their dry cleaning business, and we saw the prosperity and revenue driving the local economy and lifting up the community supports. What I didn't talk about was the sense of community spirit and the laughter and comradery we witnessed when we dropped in that Saturday. The ladies in the main sewing and stitching room all had smiles, and they were telling jokes, and you could sense the love and the friendship in the room. I'll never forget the welcoming feelings I received that day. While I feel that resource revenue is critical to the life of our First Nations and Métis communities, it is the sense of community spirit and love that's just as important.

Members of this House have been really supportive of Bill 14 and have provided thoughtful debate. Yet I've heard from people who question why Alberta would invest in indigenous communities, and I have to say, Madam Speaker, that this is not up for debate. Indigenous communities have long been held down by laws, policies, and practices that impoverished them and kept them dependent on government funds. These are the kinds of stories we expect from the long past, not today, not from our friends, our neighbours, and our loved ones.

We're in a position to support indigenous governments and communities to work around this funding crisis. The Alberta indigenous opportunities corporation is a strong, positive step toward a future of self-determination, a future in which indigenous communities can partner in prosperity instead of watching as their neighbours benefit from the lands around them.

Madam Speaker, this is a start, and starting points are usually focused. Starting with the eligible natural resource development projects, we achieve two things. First, a narrower project scope will help us more easily get into a process and evaluate progress. It's good business sense. We start the organization, let the board and staff find their footing, and explore more breadth if that's what it makes sense to do. I assure you that we have ambition for growth. As Premier Kenney has shared, this organization will become a model for other provinces to promote indigenous economic development.

Second, this focus will renew an industry that's the bedrock of Alberta's economy. Recent years have been far too hard. Even though Alberta is known for responsible and innovative natural resource development, with more indigenous participation in the industry I expect we'll be catching more global attention for environmental excellence, and that could spur more investment in Alberta.

Now, I've heard the argument that the government is imposing a direction on indigenous people. That direction, Madam Speaker, has come directly from indigenous people.

Others are questioning the indigenous makeup of the board, and to that I say: this is about maximum flexibility, ensuring that nothing will disrupt the corporation from achieving success. It's the same reason we gave ourselves the flexibility to appoint up to nine members, to ensure maximum flexibility for the board and to not risk anything standing in the way of this corporation carrying out its work. As I've said over and over and as the Premier has said, we intend to have strong indigenous representation on our board because the government understands what this opportunity means for indigenous peoples and what is required for its success. I can assure you that that will be another promise made and another promise kept. Again, actions speak louder than words, and our actions have spoken.

10:50

Let me go back to the words of Chief Morin, who shared with us a good perspective about the Alberta indigenous opportunities corporation and resource development. He said: it's clean energy, it's technology, it's opportunity for our future, and now is the time to capitalize on that.

Grand Chief Arthur Noskey of the Treaty 8 First Nations of Alberta spoke on the ancient role of the guardians of the land of our First Peoples, that they've taken on over the eons, and these are his words: many of our nations are in support of the energy sector, but as stewards of the land and waters we also have obligations; we must look at sustainable resource development and balance the production of our natural resources; our natural resources depend on us.

The word “and” is so important. Like indigenous people, this government believes in developing the economy and doing it responsibly. We can do both. We should be proud of striving to be responsible developers, Madam Speaker, and acknowledge that we will always have room to learn more and to do better. Living in a complex world, we cannot afford to wish for happy endings for our stories. We need to write those endings for ourselves and each other, and those endings should be written boldly, with focus and determination to be better and the will to take a stand against wrongdoing.

I want to again thank you, Madam Speaker, members of caucus, members across the way, and all who have contributed to the debate and the vigorous discussion on this most important piece of legislation. It’s critical that we get it right, get it finished, and get it working to benefit all Albertans, who call this great province home.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, I just would like to remind everyone that we are not to use names of members in this Assembly, a good caution for everyone moving forward.

Are there any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Associate Minister of Natural Gas.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Madam Speaker. This government has drawn a line in the sand, and we have made it clear that we will be allies of First Nations people. We saw that right away. One of the first things that this government did was that cabinet met with all 48 First Nation chiefs within the first couple of weeks of taking government. You know, that was the first thing that we saw. I have to tell you that, thanks to the Premier and the minister of indigenous affairs, I’ve actually become quite good at my dancing at powwows, because this is just what our government does, and this is just one more example of how we will be allies of First Nations communities.

Now, let me, first, begin by thanking the Minister of Indigenous Relations for his commitment to partnering with indigenous communities in building their economic and social well-being. I’m proud to be part of a government that is choosing to move beyond symbolic gestures, and I’m honoured today to speak in favour of Bill 14, the Alberta Indigenous Opportunities Corporation Act. Alberta finally has a government that understands that when First Nations and Métis communities thrive from the responsible development of our natural resources, our entire province thrives.

This is a topic that is close to my heart, and if you don’t mind, I would like to share something with you. I think we all have different reasons for why we’re so excited about this act, but mine is from when I was much younger. I grew up in a small town called Lac du Bonnet – you wouldn’t have heard of it – and there was a First Nations boy that joined us halfway through my grade 6 year. You know, I certainly didn’t at the time really know that he was indigenous. What I knew right away was that he was a big kid, and I liked that because it meant he was good at sports. I was sort of drawn to him, and we had this immediate friendship. He also had this quietness about him. At the time I mistook his reserved nature as a quiet confidence, but as an adult I look back, and I think there was lots more going on that I didn’t have access to. He was a good kid. I really liked him, Madam Speaker.

Unfortunately, he came from a lower socioeconomic background, and he didn’t have access to hockey. This was something that was very important to me. My mom, who was a great, wonderful mother, sort of took a shine to him as well, so she went around town and gathered as much used hockey equipment as she could find so that this boy could play hockey. He was fitted up with all the requisite gear. She even paid his hockey fees so that he could play hockey. That was all very well and good, but he still

couldn’t get to practices or games, so then she took it upon herself to go pick him up and drop him off after all these games and practices.

You know, there were little clues there that I should have seen, but I didn’t have access to that experience, so I didn’t recognize the clues, Madam Speaker. One of them was that he was always frozen solid when we picked him up. He was frozen solid because he would be waiting outside for almost, like, an eternity, it seemed, for us to pick him up. This was, of course, before digital clocks. I realize now that the real issue was that he couldn’t tell time, couldn’t read an analog clock. Rather than make my mother wait, he just got out there so early to make sure that he was there when she showed up.

He was such a good kid. He was a good friend of mine. Unfortunately, Madam Speaker, we sort of drifted apart as things happened. This was a small town, and I ended up going off to a private school, you know, in the city, a boarding school. In high school I got a call from my mom. She asked me if I’d heard what happened to Chris. I said no, because we had drifted apart. Well, he had been arrested. He’d had too much to drink, and he shot his mom. I mean, it really, really hit me hard because this was something that I just didn’t see coming.

What I learned from that, Madam Speaker, is that you just can’t put Band-Aids on some things. I learned that, you know, lip service is not enough. When it comes to breaking the poverty cycle, to ending things like the cycle of abuse, lip service is not enough. You need meaningful action. That’s why I like this act, because this is meaningful action. This will make a difference in the lives of First Nations communities. It’s why I’m proud to support it. What I take away from Chris’s story is that sometimes it’s not enough to just simply offer help. You need to do more, and this is that “more” that this government is going to do.

We have a long and, frankly, sad history in Canada of disenfranchising indigenous people from their communities, their culture, and their ability to prosper, but we have an opportunity now, thanks to the deliberate efforts of this minister, to right a systemic wrong and to support these communities in accessing much-needed capital. We as a society that has prospered from our country’s vast natural resources have a moral obligation to be better, to do better, and to remove the barriers that have kept indigenous communities from achieving better outcomes.

That’s exactly what the Alberta indigenous opportunities corporation will do. Instead of relying on federal money, indigenous communities will have access to \$1 billion in loan guarantees that will support First Nation and Métis co-ownership and financial participation in major resource developments. I ask you, Madam Speaker, what’s better, lip service or meaningful action? Instead of handing money to communities with little to no strategic oversight, we will now be able to work with indigenous peoples to help develop their business acumen, build up their workforce, and remove the obstacles that have prevented them from being commercial partners in our natural resource sector.

First Nations and Métis people, particularly youth, benefit greatly when given the opportunity to learn skills and access capital, but we have learned that unemployment on some First Nations is an alarming 99 per cent. We must do more to build stronger communities by providing means for employment and self-sustainability. I can only wonder how my friend Chris would have benefited if he had had access to these opportunities, if his parents before him had had access to these types of economic drivers, how things could have been different. The AIOC will allow indigenous communities to experience a higher standard of living not for themselves but, more importantly, for the generations that will follow them.

First Nations' ancestors inhabited these lands thousands of years ago, long before we began extracting our natural resources. They know and understand the land, earth, water, and air, so what better people to aid us in our efforts to develop our resources in an environmentally responsible manner than the original stewards of these lands? By reaching out and offering a truly equal hand in partnership, the AIOC will bridge the gap between indigenous groups who wish to be commercial partners in our natural resource sector. The efforts of this government, in my opinion, are what true reconciliation is all about.

Thank you for the time to address the House.
Madam Speaker, I move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mrs. Savage: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I move that we adjourn until 1:30 this afternoon.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 11 a.m.]

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