

Justin Trudeau offers encouragement to struggling Alberta energy sector

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05 February 2016

Prime minister's first visit to Calgary since elected filled with pledges for Alberta's energy sector



Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and Premier Rachel Notley hosted a roundtable meeting with a group of industry leaders Thursday, and later spoke to reporters about the discussion at the downtown YWCA after touring the facilities.

"We've agreed that we're going to work together in the coming years with industry to ensure that we are creating a pan-Canadian approach on building a strong economy and a protected environment without marginalizing or pointing fingers," said Trudeau.

"There is a sense of worry, yes, but also a sense of opportunity. That this is a time where we need to work together intelligently to prepare, not just for the difficult months to come, but for the opportunities in years to come."

A topic on everyone's minds at the event was the Energy East pipeline proposal, an issue that has spurred recent protests in Quebec. Trudeau remained neutral on the subject, commenting that the previous federal government "politicized" the approval process, and that his government will show confidence in Canada's regulators by allowing the National Energy Board time for their process.

His lack of a concrete answer about whether he would green-light the pipeline if the NEB approved the plans has drawn criticism from interim federal Conservative leader Rona Ambrose in recent weeks. After Trudeau met with Premier Notley in Edmonton Feb. 3, Ambrose tweeted: "Trudeau visits Alberta to say he might kill Energy East like he killed the NEB-approved Northern Gateway. This is a step backwards."

Alberta Wildrose opposition leader Brian Jean had further criticism for Trudeau, saying in a written memo that he was "disappointed" about a lack of specific announcements made in regards to accelerating the return of a portion of Alberta's tax dollars to the province.

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forgetting about environmental responsibilities.

"Albertans aren't asking for special handouts, all they are asking for is their governments to support their industry and fairness in how their tax dollars are spent," wrote Jean.

When asked by Calgary Sun reporter Rick Bell what his response would be to those who say that Trudeau's statements about the pipelines weren't "good enough for them," the prime minister responded: "I would point out to those folks that for 10 years, they had a government that did everything it could to try and get those pipelines built, including marginalizing community voices, ignoring first nations' concerns and completely



Prime Minister Trudeau and Premier Rachel Notley toured the downtown Calgary YWCA with CEO Sue Tomney on Feb. 3, filling bags with toiletries for patrons of the YWCA services. Nirmala Naidoo, who ran and lost for the Liberals in the October federal election, waits in line to do the same. Photo by Ashley Materi.

"That approach for 10 years failed Alberta, failed Albertans, wasn't able to get the kinds of projects that were needed built.

"We have a different approach that says 'Let's instead of excluding people from the conversation, bring them in, talk about how important Alberta is and has always been to Canada's economy... and talk about the fact that who Canadians are is people who are there for each other in difficult times.'"



“What we need to do is restore a framework in which Canadians will have trust in their regulators, in their governments, to both create economic growth that benefits all Canadians, but also protect our environment for future generations and the world,” said Trudeau about the red tape in the regulatory process. *Photo by Ashley Materi.*

Speaking at the news conference, Premier Notley confirmed that the provincial government would not move forward with a sales tax. She noted that while the province cannot control the price of oil internationally, “What we can control is how we respond to it.” Diversification is one way to do that, said Notley, stating that the NDP government would focus on creating a path “for repositioning our industry to be effective and profitable in the decades to come.”

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Tags:



Employment Insurance for Albertans is another point of contention in the province right now with near record-breaking numbers of recipients. Trudeau promised that his office was examining ways to strengthen employment insurance benefits, and mentioned that one of his campaign commitments was to make the program more responsive to Canadians who need it. Albertans are facing a hard time right now, he said, and vowed to “make sure” that EI is there for them.



Flanked by Premier Rachel Notley and Minister of Veteran’s Affairs Kent Hehr, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau shares a laugh when asked to repeat an answer in English after first speaking in French, joking that “I always sound good in French.” *Photo by Ashley Materi.*

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