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Chair: Mr. Joël Lightbound



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• (1605)

[*Translation*]

The Chair (Mr. Joël Lightbound (Louis-Hébert, Lib.):
Ladies and gentlemen, I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 33 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Industry and Technology.

[*English*]

Pursuant to the order of reference of Wednesday, June 1, the committee is meeting to study Bill C-235, an act respecting the building of a green economy in the Prairies.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format pursuant to the House order of Thursday, June 23.

[*Translation*]

Committee members who are in the room and would like to speak should raise their hands. Those who are participating via Zoom should use the “Raise Hand” feature.

This is our first meeting of the season, and I'm delighted to see you again.

I'm also very happy to receive the hon. Jim Carr.

Without further ado, I will now give the floor to Mr. Carr.

[*English*]

Hon. Jim Carr (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Hi, everybody.

I want to start by saying that it's a pleasure to appear in front of you because I have learned, especially over the last number of months, that parliamentary committees are the pulse, the heartbeat, of Parliament. I honour the work that you do.

You may think that it's odd to discuss the future of the Prairies. I'm going to start in 1901.

We have spent the last number of weeks mourning the loss of a monarch, but very few people will know that, on the day that Queen Victoria died, Winston Churchill was in Winnipeg. He looked out the window towards the west. He said, in correspondence with his mother that day in January of 1901, that someday this land would feed the world. Little did he know that it wouldn't just be what we grow. It wouldn't just be the food supply that's so essential for all of us, but that a bushel of canola might be as powerful as a barrel of oil.

It is this sense of promise, of discovery, of building an economy from the ground up, that has distinguished the contribution of

prairie Canada to the national economy and the international demands that we are meeting all of the time.

It's a very special part of the country, not only for me because I was born and raised there, but for people who appreciate this relationship between natural resources that have fuelled economic development in the region and the intellectual firepower that's a part of it.

I've always thought that stereotypes were dangerous because they are barriers to progress. If you say the word Alberta or Saskatchewan, you may get a stereotype that comes to your mind, but I bet you it's not Michael Houghton. Michael Houghton is a Nobel Prize laureate who works at the University of Alberta. He was given the Nobel Prize for his discovery of vaccines and hepatitis C.

I would prefer, if people think of stereotypes in Alberta, that they think of Nobel laureates rather than whatever else they may have in their mind. It's a tribute to the diversity and the intellectual firepower of the prairie economy.

I won the lottery in appearing in front of you today. Now I know why, when somebody wins the lottery, there are all kinds of people who want to talk to them about the best use of their proceeds. When it became apparent that I was lucky enough to be able to appear in front of you, people had all kinds of ideas of how I should use this slot.

I did have an idea of my own, and it was to build on the work that we had done across the prairie through the lens of how we can align the interests of governments, the private sector, academic institutions and the working class in order to give ourselves a better chance to move this file ahead.

Look at the diversity of what we're dealing with here. It's the natural resource of the production of energy in all of its forms. It's agriculture and value-added agriculture. It's the life sciences. It's how we manage water across our region. The only thing that gets in our way, really, are the limits of our imagination and the barriers that we erect for ourselves.

That's what this bill is all about. It's to reduce those barriers by mandating, by requiring ministers of the federal government to report back to Parliament about the framework that they have constructed in order to better align those policies. This is not a jurisdictional grab to maybe pre-empt some questions. This is within the federal jurisdiction, the federal government reaching out to counterparts in the provinces, the municipalities, the unions and NGOs, because we all have a stake in writing the next chapter of prairie economic history.

• (1610)

I don't think the template in this bill is exclusively regional. I think, if it becomes Canadian law—and I hope it will—it will be an example for other regions of the country whose inhabitants feel as passionately about their region as I feel about mine. I see this as a promise—as a possibility of working not at loggerheads or in opposition, motivated either by ideology or special interest, but in alignment around the common interest. This bill, I think, is a modest expression of what is possible.

When I was first asked by people what I thought the influence of this bill might be, my answer was, “Somewhere between absolutely zero to changing the way we do business as a nation.” We'll see where the truth lies, but I'm betting it will be somewhere in between.

The first step is agreeing that this framework will have to be reported back to Parliament within a reasonable period of time. That framework will drive the future chapters we will write together as prairie folk and as Canadians. It says we're not going to leave partnerships to chance. We're not going to leave them to the ambitions of any one government, any level of government, or any one industry or union. Its aspiration is to align the interests of all of us.

It's not pie in the sky. It's pragmatic, because what we seek to do is create wealth. We spend a lot of time in our country talking about how we are going to distribute wealth. That is a primary function of the public sector and it's important that we have rigorous debates about it. Where is the wealth coming from? Who's creating the wealth? How do we create the conditions where that wealth can be created sustainably, with an eye on trends that will drive future public policy and investment decisions? That's what we seek to achieve.

I know we have most of an hour to engage in debate. I'm really looking forward to that, Mr. Chair. It's a chance for us to think together about the best way we can achieve this common aspiration.

With those few words of introduction, I truly welcome the conversation.

Thank you.

• (1615)

The Chair: That was a very eloquent presentation, as I expect from you, Mr. Carr. Thank you very much.

Without further ado, let's start this conversation with MP Michael Kram for six minutes.

Mr. Michael Kram (Regina—Wascana, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for being here today, Mr. Carr, and welcome to the Standing Committee on Industry and Technology.

I read Bill C-235. It's my understanding that this bill applies to Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba only. Is that correct?

Hon. Jim Carr: Yes.

Mr. Michael Kram: Those three provinces are represented by 62 members of Parliament. When we voted on this bill last June, 51

of those MPs voted against it and only 10 voted in favour, with one MP abstaining.

The question has to be asked: Why do you suppose this bill is so unpopular in the only three provinces it actually affects?

Hon. Jim Carr: I wouldn't say it's unpopular. I just haven't persuaded you yet, and I have 52 minutes to try. The framework will be constructed over 18 months, so there will be a lot more time to do this. I can't possibly explain why, in the initial stage, it didn't receive support from members of Parliament. I hope that, when it's examined and the potential is assessed and some of the details are fleshed out, there will be more support than that.

I could turn the question around and ask, “Well, why did it pass on second reading?” That's because there were a number of members of Parliament who believed it was in both the Prairies' interest and the national interest.

I'm going to try harder to persuade you that it's good for our region.

Mr. Michael Kram: Okay. That's fair enough.

For years, provincial governments in western Canada and the oil and gas sector have been calling for more pipelines to get built, such as the Keystone XL, Trans Mountain and northern gateway pipelines. However, this bill talks about prioritizing projects such as tree planting and solar energy.

How will that help get more pipelines built in western Canada?

Hon. Jim Carr: The goal is not explicitly to build more pipelines in western Canada; it's to look ahead at the next generation of developing the energy sector in our region of the country. That's going to include sustainable development in the oil and gas industry. It's going to include hydrogen in Alberta. It's going to include biofuels across the region and all the traditional sources of alternative energy that are known or will be known to everybody. It doesn't constrain the possibility of moving in well-known directions or in directions that we now know through experience and following the flow of investment capital internationally. Consumers worldwide are demanding more sustainable energy development, and Canada is a part of that. Canada is actually on the cutting edge of it. Never, ever, underestimate the entrepreneurship and the capacity of traditional sectors to adapt, to adjust and to thrive. I'm sure we're going to witness that.

Mr. Michael Kram: The Government of Saskatchewan is currently forecasting \$4.7 billion in revenue from non-renewable resources for the current fiscal year. That's about one-quarter of the provincial government's budget. If that stream of revenues stops coming in from non-renewable resources, then how would you recommend the Government of Saskatchewan make up that budgetary shortfall?

Hon. Jim Carr: I'm not going to give Premier Moe advice on how to run his government. I want to reach out to Premier Moe. I have to admit that I'm sure if we try hard enough we will find alignment, because his interests are the same as ours—to create good jobs for his people, where those jobs can be found and where they can be generated, where the public environment will offer incentives for those jobs to be created, but just as there are those around this table who don't want the Government of Canada to creep jurisdictionally, I'm not going to creep jurisdictionally into Premier Moe's territory.

• (1620)

Mr. Michael Kram: Have you consulted with Premier Moe or any provincial cabinet ministers in Saskatchewan about this legislation?

Hon. Jim Carr: No, but the committee will have to. If this becomes law, it won't be a suggestion; it will be mandated. Not only that, but they're going to have to report back to you and you're going to have a chance to ask those questions. It's clear what the goal is. The goal is that they will do exactly that and they will look for alignment.

Look, if there's no spirit of goodwill ultimately, a bill like this is not going to succeed. There has to be a sense that its direct objectives are honourable and in the interests of the people we represent, and those interests are rooted in the capacity of my kids and my grandkids to choose to stay in Manitoba, or, in your case, home. That, I think, is really at the heart of what we hope to accomplish here.

Mr. Michael Kram: I'm not saying that there isn't a sense of goodwill, but what are you going to do with the feedback from the provincial premiers, which is that they do not want this bill and they do not want this framework and they would rather govern their own provinces in their own areas of jurisdiction?

Hon. Jim Carr: This bill does not encroach on their areas of jurisdiction, and they're free to do so and they should be encouraged to. It does, however, mandate that federal ministers seek alignment on those policy areas in which we can combine our efforts. There is no attempt to undermine, to encroach or to somehow cajole. It's an exercise in finding common ground. If someone says at the top end that they do not want to find common ground, that they want to be left to their own jurisdiction and that we should go home, that constrains the capacity of other jurisdictions or federal ministers to participate in what I hope to be a positive nation-building exercise.

Let's see where the framework goes, how it's developed, where the opposition lies and why, and seek to answer questions that are motivating people who may start here, but who, I hope, will end up in a different place.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[Translation]

Ms. Lapointe will now have six minutes.

[English]

Ms. Viviane Lapointe (Sudbury, Lib.): I'll be sharing my time today with my colleague MP Fillmore.

MP Carr, the rural and northern immigration program is a very successful program in northern Ontario. It helps our businesses with their workforce shortages and labour needs. It grew out of a very successful initiative in Atlantic Canada. In your opinion, would this model you're proposing be relevant to other parts of Canada?

Hon. Jim Carr: I'm glad you brought up immigration because it was actually my home province of Manitoba that initiated increases to the provincial nominee program. When we began our advocacy in 1999, Manitoba was taking in 500 provincial nominees a year. Now it's taking in more than 15,000. It fuelled the economic development of Manitoba. That model has been replicated across the country and is thought by many to be a model for the world.

It's an extraordinary example of how creative and ambitious immigration targets and a change in the way we administer the program can allow us to take full advantage of our economic potential, which was not the case in Manitoba. It was not the case in many parts of Atlantic Canada or in rural Canada.

I'm very glad you brought up that example.

Ms. Viviane Lapointe: There are many very good goals in that bill, but how do we ensure that the bill complements what's already happening in the Prairies to build a green economy?

Hon. Jim Carr: We do that by assessing where we are and where we want to be, and then by aligning the interests of everybody around the table to work together to get there.

The successes are fabulous. The story of the development of prairie Canada from so many perspectives is really a model for the world, I would say. We opened the door to the talent, the creativity and the entrepreneurship from every continent. We have the wisdom and the savvy to find a way to make those people who are so diverse feel at home. In the first place, it was agriculture that drove it and subsequently it was other industries.

If you look at the development of the demographic profile of prairie Canada, you will see a success story that should help inform us as we move forward to debate immigration policy, temporary foreign worker issues and how we relate to the rest of the world. This is an important role for us to play because we have to diversify our trading partners. We're still so dependent on our relationship with the United States. Because of our profile and because Saskatchewan—as an example—is by far the most diverse trading province in Canada, doing business with so many nations around the world, there are lessons there, too.

If you combine a progressive immigration policy with a trade policy that reaches out to those parts of the world where we have not been successful, you have a recipe for very exciting potential.

• (1625)

Ms. Viviane Lapointe: That's the end of my questions.

Mr. Andy Fillmore (Halifax, Lib.): Thank you, Chair. I will take it up if there's still time.

Jim, it's wonderful to see you. Congratulations on a wonderful PMB. I've been happy to support it so far and I look forward to continuing to support it.

You will remember back to when our government tabled a motion declaring a climate emergency. I listened carefully as we debated that in the House to my prairie colleagues and I listened to all of the debate. We learned from that debate that even though, for many Canadians—even many corporations, including energy corporations—the existential threat is climate change, for a segment of the population, which is concentrated in the Prairies, the existential threat is loss of job, not being able to pay a mortgage or put food on the table. I learned a lot from listening to that.

Now you're here today to convince parliamentarians that there's a better, cleaner and greener way to transition. If your bill passes, government and Parliament will have to work with those residents to win them over and show them a better way.

I wonder if you have any advice for us in that eventuality. How can we bring the people for whom the existential threat is economic along with us in this transition?

Hon. Jim Carr: It's by the force of argument and by the use of measurable statistics, which will be compelling to people who have open minds and an open hearts.

If they've made up their mind and if they're not interested in entertaining argument—that is to say that they dissent from their own position of “I don't know”.... This is a question for the ages: What do you do in a conversation if nobody wants to listen to you?

I happen to believe—I'm just built in a way that wants to believe—that most Canadians are open to reasonable argument and debate. If that assumption is wrong, then I wish all of us luck. I'm pretty certain that I'm not wrong. I have lots of evidence to think that people do change their minds. They change their minds when circumstances change. If they don't care about circumstance, then I don't think they have an open mind and I don't think they have an open heart.

I would remain optimistic based on that presumption of human nature, the Canadian national character and building on the success that we've already achieved together. I hope I'm right.

Mr. Andy Fillmore: I think you are, Jim. Thank you.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Fillmore.

Mr. Lemire, you have six minutes.

Mr. Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for your bill, Mr. Carr. One senses the influence your career has had on this one, but one also recognizes in it a dream to be realized. I'm disappointed that it's for the Prairies. I'm from a so-called resource region, and mining, forestry and agriculture are par-

ticularly important to us. There are a lot of similarities between the Prairie economy and ours.

I feel that a government could even use a bill like this as a blueprint for reforming Canada's and Quebec's economies by building on the strength of the territories. We need to focus more on the royalties that we can give to these places and the economic development tools specific to each of them.

I'm appalled that we're unable to build a normal everyday abattoir in Quebec with help from the federal government. It would make a world of difference to the 100 to 200 beef producers in Abitibi-Témiscamingue. They have to drive over eight hours and 800 kilometres to have their livestock slaughtered. We know that affects product quality, the environment, etc.

In my opinion, your bill should be more national in scope because it could benefit the whole country. However, the Bloc Québécois supports it because of the solutions it may bring. That could lead to other reforms that could drive economic development across Canada.

I would add with sincerity that one of Bloc Québécois' initiatives would be to have Canada sell the infamous Kinder Morgan pipeline. They said it cost \$14 billion, and that figure has now risen to \$18 billion or more. The proceeds from that could be used to set up an economic development fund for the Prairies.

Of course, at the Bloc Québécois we'll say that some of our money was used to buy that pipeline but at the same time, if it's resold it might become a driver for economic development that could fund university research, and more specifically green initiatives, as you say. That would be a plausible option for a bill like yours, giving it more depth.

First, how do you see these financing tools? Would it be through banks, insurance companies or federal transfers?

You spoke of working with the provinces and municipalities and financial products, hopefully outside the oil and gas industry, to diversify the economy. How do we do that?

• (1630)

[English]

Hon. Jim Carr: The bill is not prescriptive because that would undercut the very idea that we spend these months determining what the priorities ought to be in building this framework. However, let me agree with the premise of your introduction that this way of making decisions and coming up with what I hope is enlightened public policy is not restricted to one region of the country. If this is going to work in the Prairies, which is as diverse as I've been suggesting, why won't it work in other regions of the country, including Quebec? I think it will.

This could be seen as a template. It could be seen as a way of experimenting with a new way of going about public policy-making that could be equally applicable.

I wouldn't have any comment to make about setting up a fund of economic development on the basis of selling an asset, but I hope that the framework will include commentary on investment tools and ways in which we can properly fund the next chapter of energy development and sustainability in prairie Canada.

What you're doing is challenging the team of federal ministers, given the mandate that will be part of Canadian law if this bill passes, in order to do exactly the kind of investigations that you're calling for.

[Translation]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: You're suggesting we take an interest in several new energy sources, including nuclear energy.

Can you tell us more about how you see nuclear energy being used in the Prairies?

[English]

Hon. Jim Carr: We didn't want to exclude anything by virtue of including a list of possibilities. The framework will establish recommendations on the precise way in which various sources of energy might be used, but it didn't make any sense to me or to those of us who were involved in drafting to exclude any possible source of energy. Maybe it's there to be rejected by others at a later date, but it made no sense to leave it out.

That's why it's there. Let them have a go at it. Let them explore it. Let the controversy be joined. Let the debate be robust, as I'm sure it will be. We know people are of different views.

It was my judgment—and I still say it's a good judgment to make—to have a go and to have a debate. I think the country needs it. It's timely.

[Translation]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: I have one last question to ask.

Why do we need to go through a bill, like you're doing now? What's the added value compared to other initiatives that have been carried out?

• (1635)

[English]

Hon. Jim Carr: I don't know that we can assume partnerships will happen all on their own. I think to mandate the kinds of conversations that will have to happen is to concentrate the public mind. And let me say the private mind, too, because the role of the private sector in making these policies breathe life is essential. Without it, it's not going to happen. You're not going to have governments acting on their own to tackle all of the problems that our region is facing. It has to be in concert with the academic community that's going to drive research and development, the private sector that's going to drive investment patterns, and the public policy environment that is the responsibility of government to set.

I think we have to have a certain amount of confidence that what we're creating here is going to allow for all of those conversations

to happen in a way that's going to lead to a better result than we've had before. People will say, "Yeah, but you had all this time to do what it is that you want this bill to accomplish, but it hasn't happened." They ask, "Why hasn't it happened?"

I'm not interested in why something hasn't happened. I'm interested in helping things happen, and that's what this bill seeks to do.

[Translation]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: I didn't dare ask you that question.

Thank you very much.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll move to MP Masse for six minutes.

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Welcome back, and thank you for your service over the years in Parliament.

I'm going to go through an idea here. Your summary talks about local co-operation, engagement and a number of different things. Do you have any municipalities that are supporting this bill?

Hon. Jim Carr: I've had conversations with mayors and reeves, and organizations of municipalities. I think there is a consensus among them that to be a part of this kind of conversation in itself...

Mr. Brian Masse: There have been no endorsements yet—

Hon. Jim Carr: I haven't sought endorsements. That's something that the....

Mr. Brian Masse: Other than Saskatchewan, is there any provincial support for it, any premiers or provincial explicit support from ministers?

Hon. Jim Carr: I haven't sought that.

Mr. Brian Masse: Okay. How about first nations?

Hon. Jim Carr: Yes, I've had conversations with first nations communities. They are mentioned explicitly in the bill.

Mr. Brian Masse: Right, but have you an endorsement from them for the bill?

Hon. Jim Carr: Again, I'm not seeking endorsements—

Mr. Brian Masse: Okay.

Hon. Jim Carr: I'm seeking agreement from this committee in the first place, and then subsequently by the House to mitigate those conversations—

Mr. Brian Masse: Do you have any citizen petitioners who have been in favour of the bill? Do you have petitions running or public support?

Hon. Jim Carr: You're giving me lots of great ideas, but as I said, I've not sought at this stage to do any of that.

Mr. Brian Masse: I'm looking for consistency here, and here's the reason. I have a private member's bill, too, Bill C-248, that you voted against. It's been accused by the government side, by some members—not all—of being top-down.

I have, as converse to yours, the City of Windsor's actual explicit endorsement for the bill, including the mayor and all of council unanimously. It's the same with the Town of LaSalle. I have not only just the first nations that are supporting it explicitly. Caldwell First Nation historically used this bill, and my bill, as part of their actual reconciliation process. I also have the Province of Ontario that just passed a motion in the legislature in their first weeks of the House sitting in favour of what's taking place. I have thousands of petitioners. I have almost 10 years in the making of the entire idea for the national urban park. I have Unifor on side, the Windsor and District Labour Council, and I also have the Wildlands League, NGOs, all universally in support of it. The only opposition comes from you and government members.

I want you to reflect on that, and if you're open I want to find out—what do you think is top-down? It appears that your bill here is a little more top-down than my bill, which actually comes from the community.

Hon. Jim Carr: I wouldn't purport to be able to compare these two bills from that perspective when the objective of my bill is to end up exactly where you are now. We're just starting from different places.

Mr. Brian Masse: If we are, I started from the other place, so I'm curious. This is what has been spoken in the House of Commons against my bill. It was voted against by your members, and I still think that I want to reflect on this in terms of the accusation that mine is top-down, whereas yours does not have explicit support from anyone yet, and this appears to be more top-down.

I think we need consistency.

Hon. Jim Carr: Fair enough.

Mr. Brian Masse: I will move on with regards to canola. It's one of the things that I think has been underestimated in the Canadian economy. Can you maybe highlight a little bit about how this could help with that? I know that in the past we had the Wheat Board that would push out policies and so forth, and that's changed over time. Canola has emerged as very much a dominant staple market export. Maybe you can explain how this will help on an issue like that in a more practical sense.

• (1640)

Hon. Jim Carr: I think it just underlines the importance of converting our natural resources not only into traditional sources of energy, but also into alternate sources of energy in demand worldwide. We produce much of it. We have to be more aggressive in the way we market it, and that's an obstacle.

When I was minister of international trade—you notice they added the word “diversification”—as Shannon knows, we travelled around the world looking for new markets, and there was a reluctance among Canadian entrepreneurs to get out of their comfort zones: We speak the same language as the Americans; they're comfortable; we've done business with them forever. Business was okay, and people were risk averse. They shouldn't be risk averse;

they should embrace the challenge. You say that canola is a good example of that, and I agree with you.

Mr. Brian Masse: With regards to the transportation of goods and services to the product destination for international trade, often pipelines are focused on, but the other modes of transportation are CP and CN, and there are container issues right now. I know that in a number of different areas they're not getting out to the different markets. Is this a forum where transportation to market can also be addressed?

Hon. Jim Carr: Absolutely. You may have read the one example. There hasn't been a train to move from Calgary to Edmonton since 1985. You probably know—members around this table will know—that bus service is almost unavailable in prairie Canada. The airline connections are inadequate to say the least. So, who is grabbing that? This could easily be a forum where the interests come to the table and say that this is unacceptable. I mean, our people... Imagine seniors in rural prairie Canada trying to go from one place to another, and there's nothing available to them. Who's debating it? Who's looking for public policy solutions? This offers them an opportunity.

Mr. Brian Masse: Lastly, with regards to the groups and organizations I referenced at the start, do you think there are many out there that want to testify to this committee, and do you have a list to help us to gain access to those organizations, whether they be municipal, provincial, first nations and so forth? Can you provide that?

Hon. Jim Carr: I'm glad to work with you on the lists. I'm happy to do that.

Mr. Brian Masse: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witness.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll move to Mrs. Stubbs.

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC): Thank you, Chair. It's nice to see you again. I enjoyed working with you on the public safety committee.

Mr. Carr, it's nice to see you again. I did enjoy working both with and against you on natural resource issues during your years as natural resources minister. I also want to recognize your service both in Manitoba and to Canada, and it's nice to see you well and in person.

Far be it from me to be surprised today to agree with an NDP member from Ontario, but I'm just here to speak on behalf of the Alberta constituents I represent. Following up on the point that our colleague from Ontario made and also our Conservative colleague here from Saskatchewan, I think your bill, seven years into the Liberals being in government, is quite a negative commentary on this federal government's track record on negotiating and consulting with prairie provinces. It seems to me that your aspirations and intentions in this legislation, which I know are good, would imply that consultations so far between the various levels of government have been ineffective or lacking.

I guess what I'm curious about is how you sort of reconcile what you clearly have identified as a need for this sort of legislation against a federal government that is, for example, facing lawsuits from all three provincial governments on the carbon tax, on the shipping ban, Bill C-48, the "no more pipeline spills", and Bill C-69, which will also have major consequences, of course, not just for resources projects but all kinds of other economic development.

On those three issues, the vast majority of prairie representatives who happen to sit federally in the Conservative caucus as well as those prairie provincial representatives say they are among the top threats destroying economic development in their provinces and livelihoods of their citizens and of the people I represent.

It just seems that you are asking for a committee and politicians to create a framework and a mandate, which I presume is going to cost something, to enable a process to occur, which clearly already should be happening, but we are sitting here where we are in reality with the federal government that is being opposed on all kinds of major pieces of legislation and their policy agenda by those very provinces.

• (1645)

Hon. Jim Carr: We all could look backwards together and determine where we've gone wrong, and we might even agree, but that's not what I want to do. I want to look forward, and I want to take accomplishments where we can find them and parlay them into a bit of a road map, acknowledging that there have been mistakes made and that there are relationships that should have been developed that haven't been developed.

I spent most of two years on the second floor of my house on my little computer traversing the Prairies. Do you know what I found? In spite of all of the noise and all the confusion about political messaging, I found alignment everywhere, including in Alberta. I was surprised by it, not only because of some demographic changes that have occurred over the last number of years, but because of the very nature of the way in which we organize ourselves as provinces has changed.

I was surprised that, in the course of the day, I could, through the magic of my Surface Pro and not getting on an airplane, visit cattle ranchers in the morning, talk to the chamber of commerce at lunch and then talk to power producers in the afternoon. I would come out of that day and say that we agreed on four or five things. Why isn't anybody talking about the agreement across unions, industry, academia and government officials, a lot of important conversations with ministers of the Alberta government, as an example on issues that really matter?

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: This is what is confusing about this initiative. Those provinces, their federal representatives, their provincial representatives and their citizens, by and large, are speaking loud and clear about these consequential aspects of the cornerstone of the Liberal government's policy agenda, and they're being ignored. I guess the Liberals can take up your individual initiative to consult, but if that two-way dynamic and listening to what is being said continues to be ignored, we will gain nothing.

I think the central issue with this bill is that if we need it, it's an indictment of the current government. If the government wants to contend that consultation is already happening, it's not necessary.

Also, about your aim.... In greening the economy—you and I have had this conversation many times—I agree with you wholeheartedly about the stereotypes that are applied to various provinces. You know it's a passion of mine to bust myths about Alberta, which, of course, was the first province to have an environment minister, the first province to set, report and regulate emissions, and the first province to have a major industrial emitter levy targeted to clean tech. The oil and gas industry accounts for 75% of investment in this country for clean tech. Alberta's the biggest hydrogen producer. We are the first province with a 100% renewable energy-powered LRT. We have the largest contiguous green space. We have the oldest commercial wind farm. We have the oldest and largest commercial solar farm.

The reality is that in the province of Alberta, this environmental stewardship and leadership has been happening already because of the public policy agenda of the provincial governments and a thriving private sector fuelled by energy and agriculture, so that money is available to invest in technology. Also, to your point, there's a co-operative development of public policy framework to allow these things to happen, just like when Prime Minister Chrétien worked with Premier Klein to bring in some fiscal policies to unleash the development of in situ oil sands projects.

Here we are now with four pipelines having been killed, because of the regulatory mistakes of the Liberal government, and 18 LNG projects that have gone by the wayside, killing Canada's opportunity to be both self-sufficient and a world-leading provider of LNG across the country.

I notice—

• (1650)

The Chair: Mrs. Stubbs, we'll have—

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs:—even in your bill, you are prioritizing nuclear—I agree wholeheartedly with you—but the sitting environment minister isn't interested in that.

I think the challenge is that we probably all agree with aspirations, but what's happening in real life and with the context of this Liberal government, I think, doesn't give Albertans very much confidence.

Hon. Jim Carr: [*Inaudible—Editor*].

The Chair: I'd like to let you respond, but I'm sure you'll have other opportunities. We're way over time, but I wanted to give space for the passion that you both have for the Prairies.

We'll get back to you, Mr. Carr, for sure.

We'll go to Mr. Erskine-Smith for five minutes.

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Thanks, Joël.

Thanks for being here and for putting this bill together. I've introduced a few private members' bills in my seven years—some successful and some not—but I always find when you've tabled something, there's something you wish you'd changed or you'd thought a bit more about, and you could have tweaked something. If you had another go at it, you would have changed it oh so very differently.

I wonder, when you look at the bill now, many months after you originally worked with the legislative drafters to put it together, are there particular areas we should be looking at to improve the bill?

Hon. Jim Carr: Yes. The Minister of Agriculture should be specifically named as an implicated minister. He should have been. He wasn't. Let's change it.

I think, colleagues, that 18 months might be too long. Maybe we should think about making it a year, to give the impetus for speedier work.

Those are two examples of what I think we could streamline and tighten. Directly to your question, I've thought about those two issues quite a lot since the bill was tabled, so I would be happy if we bumped up the involvement, the participation and the naming of the Minister of Agriculture, and we reduced the time necessary for the framework from 18 months to one year.

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith: In terms of the minister, the relevant minister will remain the minister of industry in your view. Are there other ministers? You mentioned the agriculture minister not being named. I presume in section 5, under “Report”, where it says the minister must....in collaboration with environment, transport, finance and natural resources, we would name agriculture. I think that's what you said.

Is there any other minister you think should be incorporated into this legislation?

Hon. Jim Carr: Yes. The minister in charge of PrairiesCan and western economic development should be very much a part of it—even leading it. I think there have been some discussions with the ministry to see that it can happen. Somebody will have to draft an appropriate amendment, but that certainly would be fine with me.

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith: This relates to the question that Shannon was asking you, because on the one hand we can acknowl-

edge major efforts by Albertans and by industry in Alberta to advance emission reduction and to work together, both to grow the economy, but to do their part. At the same time, as a country—and this includes Alberta—more broadly, we aren't yet doing enough, and I think there is more to be done.

How do you square this idea of respecting the traditional energy industries that Shannon wants us to respect to a great degree while also moving to a net-zero economy? You've said very clearly to foster “job creation and retraining”, for example:

in regions that rely on traditional energy industries to enable them to build a zero-emissions green economy and mitigate their impact on climate change;

That's in paragraph 3(3)(b) in the bill. Have you seen opposition to that suggestion that we should be moving away from traditional energy industries to enable a zero-emissions green economy in the Prairies, or do you see that being welcomed by industry in the Prairies?

Hon. Jim Carr: I see lots of evidence that it's being welcomed.

We shouldn't underestimate the capacity of leaders in that industry to lead the way. They are sensitive in detail that you and I wouldn't run into to the movement of capital flows internationally. They know how to anticipate markets. They can read the changing sentiment in the public policy environment, in the political environment and in the funding environment, so what do you do? You take advantage of that expertise and spirit, and you work with it. I know that there are all kinds of examples of where that's happening right now.

I have.... It's not just faith: I think it's interest that the established industries know what their balance sheets are going to look like in a year. They speculate on what they will look like in five years. They're in the business of anticipating trends, and their livelihoods depend on it. They also have the capacity to invest in their instinct and in their assessment of on-the-ground realities in their world, so what do you do? You don't set them up as opponents. You embrace them as allies. That, really, if I had to give a bottom line to this bill, is “let's embrace our allies”.

● (1655)

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith: Thanks, Jim. I'm out of time.

I just want to say—and I wish, Shannon, that I were there in person with you—that you don't just have to work to agree with an NDP member from Ontario. You can agree with the Liberal member from Ontario on occasion too.

It's nice to see everyone.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you.

We now go to Mr. Lemire for two and a half minutes.

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Carr, a lot of land is kept fallow in the northern parts of the Prairie provinces. One might be tempted to let the government plant its billions of trees there. However, in my opinion, any good sustainable economy plan has to include agriculture too.

Don't you think it would be a good idea to have a financial program that allows farming on fallow land? We have nothing like that here in Canada right now.

[English]

Hon. Jim Carr: It's a great idea. I would hope, given what I've just said about the importance of agriculture as the essence of what we're trying to accomplish here in the naming of the minister... That is exactly the kind of idea that I don't think has had a full airing. So many of these issues have had no airing, and this is a chance to pump a little bit of air into that tire and for people to be accountable for it. I don't want to diminish the importance of reporting back to you. As a parliamentarian, I know that if I have a deadline and that deadline means that I have to have my ducks in a row to talk to a parliamentary committee or the whole of Parliament, I'm going to take it seriously. I have to take it seriously, and I should.

The difference between what Shannon has talked about as a seven-year legacy...is that now we're compelled. If this becomes law, there is a mandate and a compulsion to do the things that she wants done.

By the way, in the middle part of your intervention, when you reviewed all of the accomplishments within Alberta towards a sustainable energy future, I was just nodding my head. Why can't we do more of that? Why can't those accomplishments become better known?

That's what we're doing. Rather than bemoan the fact that these kinds of things ought to be acted upon, let's agree and get a move on, and then know that within 18 months or 12 months, if you agree with this possible amendment, there's going to be an accounting—and there should be.

[Translation]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Given that I went over my time for my first question, I'm going to stop here, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for being here, Mr. Carr.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Lemire. I'm very grateful to you for that.

Mr. Masse, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

[English]

Mr. Brian Masse: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have just one quick question. It's with regard to the financing of the bill in terms of costs and stuff like that. Has there been any kind of evaluation of that? You have several ministers it goes through here. To your credit, you have those ministers onside. They voted to get it here. I've questioned about the other support, but at the same time, you have their support.

Is there any kind of structural lead from the various ministers who are named in the report? I guess one of the concerns that might be expressed is that it might slow down other types of economic development parts or whatever, with conflict or so forth along that line. Who takes the lead so that it doesn't accidentally get in the way of things?

Hon. Jim Carr: Yes. It's an interesting story, by the way, about why the minister in charge of PrairiesCan wasn't named in the first place. The drafters say that you have to have statutory authority to be named as a lead minister. That ministry didn't have statutory authority, but apparently there are ways in which that can be corrected.

Again, it would be awfully presumptuous to anticipate what all of this is going to yield over time, but there is no attempt here to create any kind of mechanism for duplication or for money to be spent that doesn't play directly to the framework. The first step is to establish the framework. Then we take half a step back and say, "What are the implications of the framework moving forward?" I don't think we can answer that question yet.

• (1700)

Mr. Brian Masse: Okay.

Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Minister.

The Chair: We'll move to Mr. Mazier for five minutes.

Mr. Dan Mazier (Dauphin—Swan River—Neepawa, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Welcome, Mr. Carr. I have to be honest; any time your government starts talking about introducing legislation about the Prairies, I do worry. Your government believes in an "Ottawa knows best" type of approach, something that I do strongly oppose. Whether it be your government's carbon tax or fertilizer restrictions, your government claims to be helping the Prairies when in reality your government is really hurting them.

Have the premiers of Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta publicly supported your bill—yes or no?

Hon. Jim Carr: I have not asked the premiers to support the bill. Presumably, they will be right at the top of the list of the implicated ministers if this should become law.

Let me make a comment that might surprise you. You know, I spent all those months traversing the Prairies, however virtually, and I was asked to explain why we do so badly—we the Liberal Party—in prairie Canada. It's a source of constant frustration to me personally, as a prairie dweller, as someone who's lived in the region all my life, representing both a provincial constituency in Manitoba and a federal one in Parliament. I offer the same kind of common-sense analysis that anybody else would. We've failed continuously in aligning our political interests to the real interests of prairie folk. It's demonstrable. Just look at the results. Look at the numbers. I'm not going to try to sugar-coat the results. They're real. I'm delighted that we won a couple of seats in Alberta, on a partisan note, but we didn't win any in Saskatchewan.

It keeps me up at night. The only way you can penetrate that kind of dislocation is by opening your ears and by advancing policy suggestions that are important to the daily lives of people who live in these provinces. Show up and be there, and be there often, with both ears wide open. Clearly we have not done that, and we've paid the political price time and time again.

I hope we can change that. I'm not here to make any partisan commentary whatsoever. I'm here to look at the interests of the people who live in these provinces and try to better align our policies to make their lives more fruitful.

Mr. Dan Mazier: If the premiers all speak against the bill, will you withdraw it?

Hon. Jim Carr: It's not up to me to withdraw the bill, and it's not up to me to conduct a referendum among premiers.

The consultative process will put, at the top of the list, conversations with ministers and premiers to see if they can find alignment. If they can't find any alignment, I would be disappointed—maybe they didn't try hard enough—but the answer to your question is that I don't think that's the way it works.

Mr. Dan Mazier: This is a bill coming from Ottawa, legislating how the Prairies build a new green economy. However, just a few years ago, your government rejected the Manitoba green plan, a plan that was developed by Manitobans for Manitobans.

Why do you believe that Ottawa knows better than Manitoba?

Hon. Jim Carr: I don't know that Ottawa knows better. I do know that we have an obligation to better understand what Manitoba wants, not only as expressed by its premier or its government—because just as you may not like what you call a top-down approach from the federal government, nor would many Manitobans, may I add, like a top-down approach from the provincial government. They would want to know that the provincial government is bending over backwards to have a better understanding of what Manitobans believe to be in their best interests as we plot the next chapter of Manitoban economic history. So, I would say that top-down can be applied to any government, not just the national one.

• (1705)

Mr. Dan Mazier: I guess it really doesn't matter if the premiers don't agree with it or anything like that. It doesn't really matter because it's going to be a top-down approach anyway.

Mr. Carr, Bill C-235 mandates that the framework to build a greener prairie economy must involve various ministers. However, you've already mentioned that it has zero mention of the agriculture minister and that you're going to include that.

Did you forget to include Canadian farmers and ranchers in your bill, or is your government once again intentionally just forgetting about them?

Hon. Jim Carr: It was an oversight for which I take total responsibility and seek to redress.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll now move to Mr. Gaheer for five minutes.

Mr. Iqwinder Gaheer (Mississauga—Malton, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Carr, it's a pleasure. Congratulations on your private member's bill.

I know that, in your own words, you haven't sought endorsements, but could you speak about the level of grassroots support you've seen for this bill?

Hon. Jim Carr: During the course of my many months of talking to reeves, mayors, canola producers, ranchers and virtually every interest that in combination make up the backbone of the prairie economy, I heard people say that they want a seat at the table. This is a quote from so many: they want a seat at the table.

Well, they're going to get a seat at the table. Rather than anticipating what it is they might say—though I have a pretty good idea through these many months of talking with them—it's better that the implicated federal ministers hear directly.

I know that these will be direct, sometimes very painfully honest conversations that will lead only to better places because the level of understanding...and it plays right to the political questions that have been asked. When you are able to take that kind of attitude towards a series of discussions with people who make the prairie economy tick literally from the ground up, only good can come of it.

Mr. Iqwinder Gaheer: Great. Thank you.

If this bill were to become law, there would be a consultation phase to develop a framework. Can you talk about how the bill will ensure that everyone feels welcome to the table and actually shows up, including minorities and indigenous peoples?

Hon. Jim Carr: Because that's what the bill seeks to do and it's direct, not only in the naming of examples, but also in the spirit of what it intends to accomplish. If people were left out of the process, then they'd have every reason to say that the spirit of the bill is not being lived in real time and in real life, and that would make me very unhappy.

Mr. Iqwinder Gaheer: When critics review this bill, perhaps one of the questions raised is about how more regulation means more red tape. Is that what the bill means?

Hon. Jim Carr: It doesn't imply more regulation. It may imply less. That would be presupposing that the consultation process will yield this result. It doesn't seek to do that. It just says—I think and hope in pretty simple terms—that these partnerships don't necessarily happen on their own.

A single minister, industry or union may have the motivation or ambition to accomplish this set of goals. However, unless we find a way to rationalize, consolidate and pull out of all the special interests—to find a common, public interest—I don't think we can perform the kind of work I envision as the best possible implication of this bill. As I said to Mr. Masse a while ago, the range of impact is from zero to changing the way we do business as a country; and, as I said to the Bloc member Monsieur Lemire, it's equally applicable to other regions.

This is not just an aspirational Pollyanna exercise, by the way. It's pragmatic, because the results ought to be good jobs for our people. What stakeholder, at any level of government or in the private sector, would disagree with that?

• (1710)

Mr. Iqwinder Gaheer: Thank you, Minister.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

That concludes our final round of questions.

Mr. Carr, I'd like to thank you very much for appearing before the committee today. I'd also like to congratulate you on your private member's bill. It will now continue on its path.

This isn't the first time I've heard you talk about the Prairies with such passion, intelligence and enthusiasm. It's always a pleasure to hear you speak. You inspire us to do the same in other regions of Canada, as someone said at the meeting.

Thank you very much.

[*English*]

Before I let everyone go and adjourn this meeting, we have a notice of motion of which, I think, all parties are aware. It reads as follows:

That the clerk of the committee be authorized to grant access to the committee's digital binder to the offices of the whips of each recognized party.

Do I have unanimous consent for this motion?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Perfect. Thank you very much.

This meeting is adjourned.

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