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## **History of Alberta's oil sands policy highlights importance of government involvement**

A new report analyzing the oil sands policies of previous Alberta governments reveals the critical role of government involvement and funding in ensuring more than narrow corporate interests were served in the development of the province's bitumen resources.

In *Betting on Bitumen: Alberta's Energy Policies from Lougheed to Klein*, Calgary-based journalist and researcher Gillian Steward contrasts the approaches taken by two former premiers during the industry's early development and rapid expansion periods. The Lougheed government invested heavily in numerous government agencies and initiatives to kick-start the industry and ensure development of the oil sands would return benefits to Albertans. The Klein government, on the other hand, accepted wholesale the recommendations of an industry-dominated task force to scale back government involvement and leave decisions about the pace and scale of development almost exclusively to the private sector.

"The changes implemented by Ralph Klein in 1995 marked a seismic shift in energy policy in the province, and Alberta is still dealing with the repercussions of those changes more than 20 years later," Steward explains. "The impacts are familiar to most Albertans—from the runaway pace of development of the late '90s and early 2000s to a global reputation for poor environmental stewardship to a disregard of First Nations rights and wellbeing to a royalty regime that shifted billions of dollars from government coffers to corporate bottom lines. But much less well-known is how these changes came about."

Steward's report details how Klein's policies were based almost entirely on the industry-friendly recommendations from a single report released in 1995 by the National Task Force on Oil Sands Strategies. That task force, whose spokesman was also president of Syncrude at the time, was organized by an oil industry association, the Alberta Chamber of Resources.

"The Notley government faces the challenge of crafting energy policies amid changing realities related to climate change, growing recognition of Indigenous rights and title, and prolonged low oil prices. It is important for Albertans to understand this history if we are to avoid the pitfalls that come from giving control of development decisions about such an important resource to one stakeholder at the expense of the broader public interest," Steward concludes.

*Betting on Bitumen: Alberta's Energy Policies from Lougheed to Klein* is co-published by Parkland Institute and the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives through the Corporate Mapping Project. The report is available for download on Parkland Institute's website at [parklandinstitute.ca](http://parklandinstitute.ca).

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