

BUDGET 2004

ON ROUTE ON COURSE

Heading Toward Alberta's Second Century

The solid fiscal position of Alberta's eleventh-consecutive balanced budget is the foundation from which the government will build our future. *Budget 2004* includes the release of the government's twenty-year strategic plan, *Today's Opportunities, Tomorrow's Promise*, and the four pillars that comprise the plan.

Leading in Learning

- Learning program spending will rise to \$5.3 billion in 2004-05, up \$284 million or 5.7%.
- This increase is over and above the \$76 million added in 2003-04 to fund government-supported recommendations of Alberta's Commission on Learning, and address other basic and adult learning pressures.
- Learning program spending will increase to more than \$5.7 billion in 2006-07, a three-year increase of \$734 million, or 14.7%.
- A new funding framework for school boards will be established, providing funding to boards according to their unique circumstances, giving school boards the flexibility to address local needs and priorities.
- Post-secondary institutions will get a base operating grant increase of 4%, and 2,000 new post-secondary spaces will be created over the next four years.
- The 2004-07 Capital Plan will support more than \$1 billion in learning facilities through 2004-07: \$636 million to build, expand, and upgrade K-12 schools, \$416 million for post-secondary facilities.

Competing in the Global Marketplace

- Alberta is within striking distance of eliminating its accumulated debt. The debt will be cut to \$2.7 billion by 2005-06, down \$20 billion from 1993-94.
- The corporate income tax rate will be cut from 12.5% to 11.5%, and the small business rate will drop from 4% to 3%, saving Alberta businesses \$142 million.
- Alberta taxpayers will save \$150 million this year as the personal income tax system is indexed to inflation.
- A new Alberta Office in Washington D.C. will strengthen Alberta's relationship with the U.S., our largest trade and investment partner.
- Increased investment in animal surveillance and food safety programs, and pursuit of wheat and barley marketing choice, will help the agriculture sector better compete in the global marketplace.
- The Capital Plan provides \$2.7 billion to the provincial highway network and municipal transportation grants over the next three years.

Unleashing Innovation

- The Energy Innovation Network will link the best minds to conduct energy research and technology development, developing alternate energy sources and improving energy efficiency and emissions reduction technologies.
- A new ICT Institute will guide research and innovation in Alberta's information and communications technology sector.
- The Life Sciences Institute will link, coordinate, and encourage cross-sector research and development in such areas as agriculture, environment, forestry, health, bioenergy and water.
- Construction will continue on the Health Research Innovation Centres, the Alberta Heart Institute and the National Institute for Nanotechnology.
- HealthLink, Telehealth, and the Electronic Health Record are innovative techniques and technology to improve health care.
- Investments through Water for Life will improve drinking water management.
- A new Innovation Program will help develop innovative ideas and initiatives that improve service delivery or encourage innovation in the Alberta economy.

Making Alberta the Best Place to Live, Work and Visit

- Health and Wellness program spending will increase by \$618 million, or 8.4%, to \$8 billion in 2004-05.
- Support for health authorities will increase by \$390 million, or 8.4%, to \$5 billion in 2004-05, allowing the authorities to stay on course with sustained and expanded levels of service.
- Included in the \$390 million are targeted funds for mental health services that will support treatment and care. A new provincial mental health plan will strengthen services for Albertans with mental illness.
- Work with physicians and health regions will improve community-based supports for seniors, persons with disabilities, and mental health clients.
- Ground ambulance governance and funding responsibility will be transferred to health regions.
- Funding for policing programs will increase by \$58 million, up 50% to \$174 million.
- The population threshold for municipalities required to pay for policing will rise to 5,000, benefiting another 20 municipalities. A new \$16 per capita grant will support municipalities that pay for their own policing.
- New strategies will fight sexual exploitation of children and help prevent Internet luring, child pornography, and child prostitution.
- The new Office for Disability Issues will help better coordinate programs for Albertans with disabilities.
- Funding will be increased for seniors and affordable housing programs.
- Ongoing funding for tourism marketing and development will increase to \$24 million a year.