



PREMIER ED STELMACH
Address to Albertans
October 24, 2007

Alberta **A PLAN** for the Future



Good evening.

I want to speak with you tonight about the future of our province.

The stake we all share in that future.

And how we can define the future together — as Albertans.

This is a unique moment in Alberta's history.

At the beginning of our second century, our province enjoys unprecedented opportunities.

There's global demand for our resources, and we're recognized as a safe and stable supplier of energy.

We've become Canada's engine of economic growth — the only debt-free jurisdiction in North America, with no sales tax and low personal taxes.

There's no doubt our province is doing very well.

The prosperity and quality of life we enjoy today is thanks in large part to the innovation, determination, and hard work of the people of this great province.

Because of you, Alberta's future is bright.

Most importantly — we have the ability to build a future where prosperity goes hand in hand with opportunity, a world-class quality of life, and a deep respect for the environment we've inherited.

The critical issues facing Alberta today are clear.

Can we address the growth pressures we face, secure a lasting prosperity — and get ahead of the curve?

Can we balance unprecedented growth and rapid urbanization with protection of the environment?

And can we preserve the quality of life and traditional Alberta values we all cherish?

I believe the answer to each of those questions is an emphatic yes.

Together we can build the Alberta we want — a province we'll be proud to leave to our children.

And I want you to know your government has a solid plan to make this happen.

A plan that builds our communities, protects the environment, and creates the next wave of opportunities for our children and grandchildren.

A plan that transforms the opportunities of today into a secure tomorrow.

We've already made a good start — and I want to take a moment to update you on the actions your government has taken to meet the many immediate challenges we face.

Let me be frank.

When my government was sworn in ten months ago, Alberta was not keeping up with the province's growth.

Demands on the public services we all rely on — from our roads and highways to our hospitals, schools and universities — were outpacing our ability to deliver.

We recognized these challenges, and we acted.

We launched the most aggressive investment in public infrastructure in Alberta's history — 18 billion dollars over three years — to provide the roads, schools, and hospitals Albertans need.

Alberta's municipalities are on the front lines of growth, and I promised help.

As a result, we've committed 11 billion dollars in new funding over the next decade to help municipalities tackle their infrastructure priorities and build stronger communities.

From water plants to street repair to affordable housing and recreational facilities — all Albertans will benefit from this investment.

With these new dollars, Alberta provides the most support for municipal government in all of Canada.

And all municipalities have been treated fairly and equally under this new 10-year plan.

As important as it is to invest in infrastructure, our plan is about more than bricks and mortar.

It's about people.

For example, our world-class health facilities are attracting some of the finest physicians and medical specialists from around the globe — providing Albertans with access to outstanding care.

We're focusing on improving the public healthcare system — because that's clearly what Albertans want and expect.

We're taking action to add doctors and nurses to the system to reduce wait times.

A rapidly-expanding health care system needs staff, and we recently announced details of a 30-million-dollar plan to increase the number of health care workers.

We're also helping those in need — for example by increasing support for Albertans with disabilities.

The future of our province is indeed bright.

Economic growth is set to continue, and more people will be drawn to Alberta to fulfill their dreams and be part of our great adventure.

Best estimates suggest that within 20 years Alberta's population will be approaching five million — that's potentially one-and-a-half million new Albertans!

That's a positive and exciting trend — and one that we will be prepared for.

Our plan for this exciting future is straightforward and practical — rooted in our deeply cherished values, and guided by a vision of greater opportunities and a better quality of life for all Albertans.

BUILDING COMMUNITIES

As our population grows and becomes more diverse, supporting strong communities is key to ensuring that our high quality of life is sustained and enhanced.

We will implement a 20-year capital plan that responds to immediate pressures, and ensures that longer term needs are anticipated and addressed, with a clear commitment to keep pace with a changing Alberta.

The current backlog didn't happen overnight — and we won't be able to fix it overnight.

But we will get it done!

We'll build the transportation systems, health and seniors facilities, schools and universities, affordable housing, and recreation and cultural opportunities that a growing province needs.

Strong communities are much more than roads and buildings.

They're built with strong families.

That's an Alberta tradition — and we have the opportunity to ensure that our province remains the best place to live, work, and raise a family.

Albertans deserve to feel safe in their communities.

And in the days ahead we will be announcing a significant new strategy to reduce crime and bolster law enforcement.

We must take criminals off our streets — and keep them off!

Equally important — we must address the factors that give rise to crime, such as drug and alcohol abuse.

As our province grows — we will not sacrifice the values Alberta is built on.

We'll enhance and better co-ordinate the wide range of services already available to support the well-being of our children, seniors, and those most in need.

High quality childcare, world-class education opportunities, long-term care for the elderly — these are the true measures of a compassionate society.

In the Alberta we're building, those needs will be met — because all Albertans must share in the benefits of prosperity.

I recognize that governments alone cannot create the communities we want.

The dedicated work of community groups and volunteer organizations contributes greatly to our health and social services — to our quality of life.

Albertans have always seen the potential within our province and its people, and we're willing to roll up our sleeves to help make it even better.

Those traditional values deserve support.

As a government we have already announced a 50 per cent tax credit for every dollar donated over 200 dollars — the highest in Canada.

But I believe there is much more we can do to support Albertans helping Albertans.

I'm committed to expanding cultural, historic and outdoor opportunities for all Albertans — young and old — to experience and share their pride in Alberta.

GREENING OUR GROWTH

As Canada's most dynamic province, we must take a bold leadership role on important issues, and nothing's more important than protecting the land we've inherited.

As Albertans, we live in one of the most spectacular and beautiful places on earth.

We're blessed with abundant natural resources that are the basis of our current and future prosperity.

Albertans rightly expect their government to strike a sustainable balance between development and conservation.

I'm determined that other countries will recognize Alberta as a global leader in responsible resource development.

We can't wait for the perfect international agreement — so while others talk Alberta acts.

As a result — we're forging a sound and practical environmental vision.

We're working with industry to find creative, innovative solutions that we can implement today to preserve our environmental heritage.

Finding the balance between development and conservation is the great challenge of our time, and that balance starts with a practical plan that encourages innovation and sets realistic goals for industry.

CREATING OPPORTUNITY

Albertans can proudly say that we are the first jurisdiction in North America to place real and measurable limits on large industrial plants that produce about 70 per cent of Alberta's greenhouse gas emissions.

That's a good beginning — but we need to do more.

Because in Alberta today we're experiencing industrial development on a scale never before seen in our province.

We need to raise the bar in managing the impact of this development.

And we have, with a bold new strategy that looks at the overall impact of growth on our air, water and land.

Instead of looking at developments project by project, for the first time we'll assess the overall environmental impact, and set limits for various regions of Alberta.

We have a comprehensive strategy for protecting our water, and we will soon be introducing a framework to better manage the competing demands on Alberta's landscape.

Alberta must capitalize on new opportunities if we are to continue growing our economy, building strong communities, and securing long term prosperity — for all Albertans.

Central to our future prosperity is a commitment to add value to our traditional strengths in energy, agriculture, forestry, tourism, and health sciences.

We must build on those strengths, and develop new areas of promise.

This will involve making choices — and even taking some risks.

But being timid and doing nothing is a far greater threat to our future.

The diversification of our economy will be driven by the creativity and innovation of Albertans.

And we'll support them by encouraging investment and research that transforms new technologies such as life sciences, material engineering, and nanotechnology into commercial successes...

Not in the U.S., Asia or Europe — but here, in Alberta!

RESOURCE ROYALTY FRAMEWORK

We all know that much of our resource wealth is non-renewable.

Once used — it's gone forever.

So to build a stable and prosperous future, we must ensure we get the best economic return on the development of our resources.

Alberta's current oil and gas royalty regime has attracted billions of dollars in investment.

It has created one of the most successful economies on earth.

But from time to time all policies need to be reviewed and updated.

I heard that message loud and clear from Albertans as I sought the leadership of our province last fall.

And when I took office I ordered an independent review of our royalty system.

As I'm sure you know, the review panel delivered their recommendations a few weeks ago.

I made their report public as soon as we received it — so that it could receive the widest possible public debate.

And that's certainly happened.

We've taken the time to give this important issue the serious thought Albertans would expect from their government.

And we've taken the time to get it right.

Now we're ready to take decisive action.

Tomorrow we'll be releasing details of a new royalty framework.

One that delivers the fair share Albertans rightly expect from the development of their resources.

I promised you a royalty system that works for Albertans — who own the resources — and also for the companies who invest billions of dollars in our economy.

And that's what we're doing.

The new framework will enable Alberta to plan for a secure future.

It will provide the stability and predictability business needs, and time to adjust to the changes.

And it will address my goal of adding value to our exports and expanding our economy by upgrading our resources right here — in Alberta.

Our energy industry is undergoing historic changes.

The oil and gas deposits that have underwritten our prosperity in the past are gradually depleting.

We're seeing the development of new and innovative techniques to get the most from these traditional sources of energy...

And we'll continue to encourage those developments.

But in the coming decades our jobs and prosperity will increasingly depend on the development of new sources of energy such as the oil sands and coal-bed methane.

This royalty regime recognizes these changes — the need to create new industries, new jobs, and build for the future.

Decades from now, when our conventional energy resources are gone, our children must be left with an economic foundation for their prosperity.

We will secure Alberta's future.

GOVERNING WITH INTEGRITY

My grandparents came to Canada in 1898 — when Alberta was still a district of the Northwest Territories.

Like so many immigrants to this country — then and now — they came to Canada in search of hope, opportunity, and an open society.

And they found it.

I thought about that a lot when I became Premier, so last December I wanted my swearing in ceremony to be in public — in full view of Albertans, on the steps of the Legislature rather than in some private room.

Governments earn the trust of the people by being open and accountable.

Governing is a privilege not a right, and that privilege has to be continually earned.

I believe that, with all my heart — and I wanted to signal a fresh start — a new approach.

And I'm happy to say we've done that.

Information that was previously hard to get — flight logs, ministers' expenses — is now routinely posted on the web for everyone to see.

If you want to lobby government, you will have to register — so Albertans will know who's seeking to influence their elected representatives.

And for the first time in Alberta we've instituted all-party committees to give the opposition a chance to contribute in a positive way.

We need new ideas — new attitudes — to secure Alberta's future.

I've described to you tonight a new plan for a new time, and a new Alberta.

An Alberta built on solid values, but ready for the challenges of the future.

That's my promise as your Premier.

To create an Alberta that reflects our provincial motto — strong and free.

A place where you can reach for your dreams.

A province where government gets out of your way — and where you can keep the fruits of your hard work.

I'm excited to be leading this great province at such an incredible time in its history.

Because where Alberta is 30 years from now depends on the direction we establish today.

That's a unique opportunity — and a profound responsibility.

But I know we're up to the task.

Like you, I'm a proud Albertan, and I know that working together, we can build a province that's a beacon of hope and prosperity...

Not just within Canada, but for the entire world.

The plan I've outlined tonight honours our past, addresses the challenges of the present, and builds a bridge to future prosperity.

By working together, I know we can achieve those goals.

I invite you to join me in making that future a reality.

Thank you for listening to me tonight.

And God bless Alberta.

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