



Speech from the Throne

Fifth Session of the Twenty-Seventh Legislature
February 7, 2012

Delivered by

His Honour, Col. (Ret'd) the Honourable Donald S. Ethell,
OC, OMM, AOE, MSC, CD, LLD, Lieutenant Governor

Alberta



My fellow Albertans, honourable members and distinguished guests, welcome to the Fifth Session of the Twenty-Seventh Alberta Legislature. It is my honour to deliver the Speech from the Throne, and my privilege to serve the people of this province as Lieutenant Governor.

While these are trying times, other nations' difficulties do serve to remind us of how fortunate we are to live in Alberta.

We are blessed with a free and fair political system built on enduring constitutional foundations. And in 2012, this arrangement will receive the attention it deserves as we celebrate the Diamond Jubilee of Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II. Sixty years ago yesterday, His Majesty King George VI passed away, and Her Majesty ascended the throne. For six decades, she has dedicated herself to serving as the anchor of the Commonwealth and the monarch of our great nation. I know that many Albertans are as eager as I am to congratulate Her Majesty on her distinguished record.

We are blessed to reside in a province with unlimited opportunity. Alberta has abundant resources, world-class industries and an indomitable spirit of enterprise and innovation. We have the ability, desire, knowledge and freedom to attain our full potential.

In my lifetime alone, Alberta has come a long way.

I arrived in this province in the early Fifties as a young soldier in the Canadian Forces. Forced into hospital by a leg injury, I found myself surrounded by convalescent First World War veterans.

They were receiving the very best care and while it kept them alive, that was all it could do. These individuals and their families faced a limited future.

Today, we have innovative institutions like the Glenrose Rehabilitation Hospital and the University of Alberta's Faculty of Rehabilitation Medicine using previously unimaginable techniques like robotics and neural engineering to restore function and help heal the hidden trauma of disabilities. Now, such individuals have a future without limits.

This is the future your government wants for all Albertans. The key to Alberta's success is its people and the vision they have for what this province can become. Our lives today are immeasurably better because Albertans in the past were inspired to look beyond the limits of their times, to a vision of unmet needs and a greater future — and then act upon it.

A little more than forty years ago, Alberta set out on the road to the modern age under the leadership of people with such foresight.

Four decades ago, our province was just beginning to find its place in an uncertain, fast-changing world. New and untested opportunities glimmered on the horizon, and Alberta's government in 1971 resolved to make the most of them, promising to build "a society that is not inferior to that in any province or state in North America." It succeeded magnificently.

That government set forth with a clear vision for Alberta and fulfilled it. But not by playing it safe. Recognizing the need for imaginative new programs, it made bold decisions that built up the province we take for granted today.

It nurtured Alberta's energy sector, identifying the oil sands' potential and implementing the policies necessary for its long-term success. And to save for future generations, it created the Heritage Fund. Alberta would never have become a global leader without such foresight.

This was a government that boldly used an uncertain environment to its advantage, looking beyond the demands of the present to build lasting success and modernize Alberta.

Now, two generations on, Alberta faces fresh challenges. Long-established ways are being called into question and comfortable assumptions are being examined anew, while Albertans themselves are growing older.

Your government will not miss the opportunity to reshape Alberta in response.

Alberta's families and businesses have a government that will help them adapt and build a province that present and future generations will be proud of.

The actions we take today will help us reach our potential as individual Albertans and as a province. Our time is now, and your government will lead.

Your government will secure this province's economic future at home with smart spending and abroad by improving our competitiveness in global markets. Your government will listen to Albertans, engaging them on the issues that matter to bring about the change they want and need.

Together with Albertans, your government will make Alberta the best jurisdiction anywhere, based on a thriving economy and a quality of life that is the envy of the world.

Your government will start with the root of success: sound finances.

Our main trading partners are struggling with debt and low growth, yet Alberta is in a stronger position. We are heading toward balanced budgets, reliable revenue streams and strong economic growth.

However, Alberta's current fiscal framework relies too heavily on volatile energy revenue as a source of income.

It's time for foundational change. It won't be easy, but it is the right way to better manage the annual unpredictability in the budgeting process.

And it begins now. Budget 2012 will bring predictable funding on a three-year cycle to education, advanced education and municipalities. Your government will work with its partners in these areas to allow for greater stability, improved long-term planning and delivery of outcomes.

Your government will also introduce a new budgetary review process that includes a results-based approach, one that will allow for a thorough examination of how public spending is achieving outcomes for Albertans. Your government will examine its entire fiscal framework to ensure it spends Albertans' tax dollars appropriately, while saving intelligently for your future and for generations to come.

This will include reviews of the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust and Sustainability Funds, capital and infrastructure projects, gaming revenue, our operating budget and income taxes, along with reviews of existing programs.

Once in every three-year cycle, each part of the government, including agencies, boards and commissions, will come under the spotlight. Your government will scrutinize all costs and challenge the automatic growth of spending, assigning funds

only where they are needed. There must be a disciplined relationship between public expenditures and benefits for Albertans, resulting in no unjustified increases to departmental budgets.

With a new and robust plan linking expenditures to actual outcomes, your government will treat Albertans' money with the same care and respect they do, spending wisely on the services Albertans count on for an outstanding quality of life.

Education is one way to protect that standard of living. The nature of work and progress is changing and as technology advances, the demand for highly skilled, educated workers will increase.

Alberta must be able to succeed and thrive in the global knowledge economy, and that means giving every Albertan the opportunity to benefit from a cutting-edge education, from kindergarten to post-secondary, so everyone can reach their full potential.

Your government will strengthen Alberta's post-secondary sector, recognizing it as a key driver of a robust knowledge-inspired economy. By enhancing our trade and technology institutes and colleges, this government will help Alberta nurture the most highly skilled and trained workforce anywhere. Through the Building and Educating Tomorrow's Workforce Strategy, your government will increase the supply of highly skilled, educated and innovative people and high-performance work environments that make maximum use of innovation and technology.

Your government will attract the world's top talent to Alberta to contribute to a research agenda that will position this province on the international stage as a leader in helping to solve many of the world's challenges in energy, water, food, health and improving our quality of life.

Your government will identify strategies to recruit more students from Métis and First Nations communities, so they can continue to contribute to Alberta's success and solidify the bonds that sustain their heritage and keep their communities together.

Albertans' quality of life is driven in large part through finding innovative approaches to deliver publicly funded health care. Your government is committed to improving access to primary care for all Albertans.

In 2012, building on the success of primary care networks, your government will embark on a plan to expand community-based care through the introduction of family care clinics staffed by multidisciplinary teams of health-care professionals. Patients in need of medical attention will be able to get it, quickly and easily, at publicly funded clinics close to home. Your government will begin with the implementation of three pilot projects this spring.

Expanding access also means enhancing the way allied professionals such as pharmacists, nurses and nurse practitioners interact with patients, allowing frontline staff to handle more duties and easing pressure on the health-care system. Your government will enable health-care providers to better meet Albertans' needs through a team-based approach.

Your government has fulfilled its commitment to empower the Alberta Health Quality Council to run an independent inquiry into various aspects of the health-care system to make sure it delivers timely, unprejudiced and equitable outcomes in which Albertans can have confidence.

The strength of the publicly funded health-care system of today rests on the foresight and commitment of our local communities. This requires a strong relationship with government that offers communities a meaningful role in long-term planning and coordination of services at the local level. Recognizing this fundamental principle, your government will give local Health Advisory Councils a more active voice and greater input in decisions that impact their communities.

A successful Alberta is one in which every Albertan is empowered to be part of the economic, social and cultural life of the province.

Your government is bringing these values to the services it provides to all Albertans.

Your government will provide seniors with the supports, services and care they need to remain healthy, happy and productive. This includes measures to help them stay in the peaceful security of their own homes, surrounded by the warmth of family, for as long as possible.

Your government's commitment to protecting property rights embraces all Albertans. To strengthen those rights, it created a taskforce that met with Albertans and listened to learn what property rights mean to them. Your government will use Albertans' contributions to make common-sense decisions on this issue.

Your government believes that a vibrant arts and culture scene is vital to the fabric of Alberta's communities, and it will continue to work with partners to keep the sector flourishing. Your government looks forward to engaging constructively with community leaders from diverse cultural and creative organizations to find the best methods of encouraging growth.

Healthy businesses are a crucial part of a strong economy. Your government will work hard to create and maintain the conditions for their success, before getting out of the way.

Your government is committed to the development of northern Alberta as a prosperous and attractive place to live, work and play. It will initiate a comprehensive Northern Alberta Development Strategy to help the region continue to grow and develop in a sustainable manner, with an outstanding quality of life. Your government will work creatively with municipalities and industry to address infrastructure challenges. The North is the source of much of our prosperity, so success there is critical for a successful Alberta overall.

A terrific quality of life requires the province to work closely with all municipalities. Your government will continue to build on its long tradition of effective partnership with municipal governments as part of the review of the Municipal Sustainability Initiative.

The review will focus on having a streamlined program with increased flexibility, giving municipalities an even greater ability to meet local needs. And your government will work towards establishing three-year funding cycles so municipalities can count on stable, predictable funds.

Municipalities support strong communities.

And strong communities are safe communities. Your government will continue its support for anti-gang initiatives, while reaching out to at-risk youth to deny organized crime new recruits.

Your government will proudly tell Alberta's story and promote Albertans' vision and actions on the world stage. Your government will better integrate our global strategies as we continue to bolster Alberta's reputation abroad, showcasing our diversity in everything from tourism to arts and culture, education, and trade and investment opportunities. And Albertans can be sure this government will fulfill its role responsibly and honestly.

It will cooperate closely and openly with Ottawa, building on its strong relationship with the federal government. A strong Alberta is one that can put aside jurisdictional differences and stand as a proud, committed and constructive member of Confederation.

The federal government and the province share much in common, including the desire to give farmers more choice through the dismantling of the Wheat Board and a commitment to bringing down crime through new, more stringent federal legislation.

Albertans expect government to work together on their behalf and your government will not let you down. But in doing this, it will not shy away from standing up for this province. Your government will never hesitate to reiterate Albertans' perspectives at federal, provincial and territorial levels.

A Canadian Energy Strategy will play a major role in this effort. Energy is critical to our prosperity, but Alberta must diversify its customer base to achieve the greatest returns. Your government will actively design initiatives to access global markets and assist Canadians and our trading partners in understanding Alberta's energy goals. The infrastructure necessary to get our resources to new markets must cross other jurisdictions, so any expansion will involve various partners at the provincial, national and international levels. The more we work together to coordinate our efforts, the greater our success and the more prosperity for everyone involved.

The people of this province share a deep love and respect for its environment and natural resources. And your government will develop them responsibly in the interests of all Albertans. Your government will continue to partner with Ottawa to defend Alberta's energy sector and develop an improved oil sands environmental monitoring program that is among the best in the world. Both governments are now standing together behind a plan that is credible, science-based and fully transparent. Your government's action on establishing and reaching key environmental outcomes and sharing its performance with Albertans and the world will leave no doubt of its commitment to these goals.

Albertans know their livelihoods and communities are tied to the land and water we all cherish. They want their children to inherit a province as clean, healthy and productive as the one they inherited. The twin needs of keeping Alberta beautiful and its economy healthy are not starkly opposed. By investing in emerging technologies, this government will do both.

But our natural resources extend beyond oil and gas. Agriculture is the largest renewable industry in our province and your government wants it to stay that way. Alberta's rural communities are a critical piece of Alberta's success story.

Settlers and farmers founded this province and their values run deep. Through policy development, advocacy and programs and services that reinforce market access and economic competitiveness, your government will preserve and expand the legacy they left us, ensuring our farmers are the best in the world. Our prosperity is intimately tied to the strength of rural Alberta, and government will never forget it.

Over forty years ago, a bold government saw the need for sweeping change and rose to the occasion, ushering in a new era of prosperity and progress for Alberta.

Now, the time has come to bring that spirit and vision into the 21st century. The world is changing faster than ever, and we must stay at the forefront.

Alberta can be proud of rich natural resources, North America's most competitive business environment and a vibrant technology and innovation sector that helps push human achievement to unparalleled heights.

All these advantages rely on the passion and drive of Albertans, who make them possible.

And it is Albertans who will always remain the central focus of this government.

It will help all Albertans reach their full potential, setting the stage for future generations to enjoy even greater success.

It will revitalize publicly funded health-care services to increase access and suit an aging population with diverse needs.

It will find new and effective ways to reach out to vulnerable Albertans and make them a part of the province's success story.

It will revamp Alberta's education system so all graduates can hit the ground running and contribute more effectively than ever.

It will budget for the long-term and be rigorous in managing our fiscal framework, so all Albertans can count on the services they need for many years to come.

History has shown us that short-term focus can result in long-term problems. Your government will address the root causes of problems, rather than just respond to symptoms. Albertans expect better and demand excellence.

And so above all, your government will not waver. It will not be deterred from change. Your government will not let you down.

Thank you ladies and gentlemen. May God bless you all.

God bless Alberta. God bless Canada. God save the Queen.

