

# Speech from the Throne: March 2, 2017

## THIRD SESSION OF THE TWENTY- NINTH LEGISLATURE

Friends, welcome everyone to the first day of this new session of Alberta's Legislature.

As we gather today on Treaty Six land, we are reminded again of the bedrock importance of this institution to the democratic life of our province.

Albertans come from every part of the globe.

We are an open and inclusive society built on enduring values – compassion, hard work and justice.

In an uncertain world, these values are more important than ever – our North Star to guide us through our deliberations as we seek to build a better province for every Albertan, no matter their background, birthplace or creed.

We are one province, one people on a common journey towards a common future.

Let's never forget that.

The power of these values revealed themselves again this past year.

Albertans came together in a time of extraordinary danger.

As the Wood Buffalo wildfires tore through communities, we stood as one – as fellow citizens with a shared responsibility to each other.

When called upon, ordinary women and men from all walks of life do extraordinary things.

Therein lies hope for the future, not only here in Alberta, but throughout the world.

Of course, the wildfires were one of the most significant events in what has been a very challenging time in Alberta's history.

The collapse in the world price for oil continues to affect the well-being of families and communities, reverberating at boardroom and kitchen tables throughout the province.

## **Cutting the growth of government spending**

It has also affected the province's bottom line.

For too long, Alberta tied spending to the price of oil, which resulted in volatile funding swings for core services.

For instance, under former governments the rate of yearly spending growth increases was as high as 11 per cent.

Your government stopped that practice.

Through diligent action and targeted reductions, we are bringing the rate of spending growth down, thoughtfully and prudently.

Your government has cut and amalgamated government agencies, frozen salaries for cabinet ministers, MLAs, political staff and management in the civil service, and streamlined spending across government.

For example, last week your government took action to cut salaries and eliminate bonuses for the highest paid executives of agencies, boards and commissions, including eliminating perks such as retention bonuses, golf club memberships and housing allowances.

As we pursue further spending reductions, your government will hold firm to the belief that spending reductions should never happen at the expense of our schools, hospitals and those very things Albertans rely on to weather the downturn and provide for their families.

Such reductions certainly should not happen at the expense of Albertans who need government to have their backs in a crisis, such as the residents of Wood Buffalo.

## **Working to make life better for families**

Now more than ever, the fundamentals matter.

Albertans are worried about the basics: paying the bills, keeping or finding a job, saving for retirement and their children's education, and caring for loved ones.

As our economy recovers, families rightly expect their government to help them come through the downturn and make their lives better.

Your government understands this is its core responsibility – *to make life better for everyday Albertans.*

Over the last two years, your government has aimed its every action and decision at meeting this test. We will continue to do so.

## **Building new pipelines**

Making life better starts with coming to terms with an economic reality that past governments failed to address.

*Alberta is too dependent on selling its energy products to one customer at one discounted price.*

As a result, we have been at the mercy of global economic forces over which we have no control.

This must change.

Under this government, it is changing.

In last year's Speech from the Throne, your government committed to erasing doubts about Alberta's environmental reputation as part of an effective economic diversification strategy that would break Alberta's land lock and open up new markets for our oil.

The plan is working.

Last November, the Government of Canada approved the Trans Mountain Pipeline and Line 3, citing Alberta's Climate Leadership Plan as key to its decision.

Let there be no doubt, the approval of these two pipelines is a historic step forward.

Though we won't celebrate until the first drop of oil leaves Canadian shores from a new pipeline, we recognize the spirit of cooperation and hard work by those who have brought us to this point.

Our energy industry, Indigenous communities, environmentalists, and ordinary Albertans came together in common purpose, showing, once and for all, that a strong economy and a clean environment can – and must – go hand in hand.

In the weeks and months ahead, your government will remain focused on bringing this pipeline to completion.

But to get the job done, we must all pull in one direction.

We must speak with one voice and communicate one message: a strong energy industry supports a strong Canada.

This is a message we will repeat at every opportunity.

On the Trans Mountain Pipeline, our work is not done.

In any and all appropriate forums, your government will continue to make the case that this pipeline is critical for Albertans and all Canadians.

To that end, your government will defend our province and its key industry in court, seeking intervener status on legal challenges to the Trans Mountain Pipeline.

Trans Mountain is not the end of our market diversification efforts. This year we will also continue to work thoughtfully and respectfully with the federal government, Indigenous communities and elected officials across Canada on the Energy East pipeline proposal.

## **Creating and supporting jobs**

Your government's singular determination to build new pipelines to Canada's shoreline is for an equally singular reason:

Alberta's energy industry creates good jobs, and good jobs are the bedrock of a strong province.

### **Good jobs in Alberta's energy industry**

Since the beginning of its mandate, your government has zeroed in on the task of supporting Alberta's energy industry.

Three weeks ago, Alberta celebrated the 70th anniversary of the Leduc #1 oil strike, which inaugurated the rise of modern Alberta – strong, confident and proud.

Over those seven decades, Albertans have become world-class innovators.

The same is true today. Through innovation, our energy industry will always stay ahead of the pack.

Innovation is one of the driving motivations behind Alberta's modernized royalty framework.

The new framework is now doing its work, offering incentives to reduce costs, improving efficiency and, through increased activity, creating jobs – a fact recognized by industry leaders and energy experts.

Although the framework only came into force in January, many producers opted in early, leading to the approval of 158 new wells that would not have otherwise been drilled last

year, with each well supporting up to 135 direct and indirect jobs.

Mid-January of this year saw a 50 per cent increase in active rigs compared with the same point in 2016.

Shipments in energy products in December of last year were the highest in two years and almost double the 2016 low.

Your government is taking action to build on this momentum, and make life better for families.

In addition to accessing new overseas markets, this year further work will be undertaken to add value to our energy products here at home.

Through the Petrochemical Diversification Program, your government will continue to work alongside our energy industry to push forward on the construction of two new world-class petrochemical plants.

These new plants will create thousands of jobs and diversify our economy by adding value to our energy resources here in Alberta, producing products used in plastics all over the world.

Later this year, we will receive recommendations from the Energy Diversification Advisory Committee. Committee members are currently consulting with industry, economists, academics and labour to find ways to get more value and more jobs from our energy resources, and diversify our economy.

Also, your government is working with Ottawa to create good oilfield service industry jobs and make sure more orphaned wells, those no longer under the care of a company, are safely closed and reclaimed.

## **Creating jobs across our economy**

As important as it is to create jobs in energy, it is equally critical we create jobs across our economy, in agriculture, forestry, tourism and manufacturing, as well as in emerging sectors, such as high-tech, craft brewing and more.

To help, your government has cut small business taxes, created new tax credits to encourage innovation, and helped entrepreneurs get loans to start new businesses.

The newly introduced Capital Investment Tax Credit and the Alberta Investor Tax Credit – both of which are tax credits other provinces have enjoyed for years – are doing exactly what they are supposed to: helping business expand, innovate and hire more people.

This year, work continues to support small businesses, entrepreneurs and job creators.

Alberta's agricultural producers are the world's best, and so are the products made by them.

Building on investments your government made last year, such as capital to expand the Agrivalve Processing Business Incubator and Food Processing Development Centre in Leduc – an investment that doubled the size of that facility, making it the largest of its kind in Canada – this year will see further support to help Alberta's agrifood entrepreneurs.

Entrepreneurs across the province will also get tailored new supports.

The expansion of more entrepreneurship incubators in communities across Alberta will help get good ideas off the ground and provide new businesses with tools to help them grow.

Alberta small businesses with this type of support average a 25 per cent annual growth rate compared with a rate of less than five per cent nationally.

Your government will also remain nimble and responsive to good ideas for bringing more business to Alberta, like we were with the City of Lethbridge to ensure the expansion of Cavendish Farms – the single largest private-sector investment in the history of Lethbridge – which will create good jobs and more opportunities for Alberta farmers.

## **Clean energy**

This year, your government will also move forward on attracting more renewable energy investments.

When it comes to renewables, investors worldwide are looking to Alberta as the next exciting place to bring their money.

This spring, the first competitive renewable energy auction will take place, securing up to 400 megawatts of new renewable energy investment in Alberta.

Over the coming years, more renewable auctions will take place, keeping Alberta on track to add 5,000 new megawatts of renewable energy capacity while also generating more economic activity, in a more diversified economy, and creating jobs.

While your government works to attract more renewable energy, we need to ensure that green power is backstopped by strong, stable power from clean-burning natural gas.

So, this year, your government will continue with Alberta's electricity market transition.

By changing our electricity market so it is no longer a risky outlier in North America, we can provide more stable, predictable prices, less risk for investors, and attract the new natural gas generation investments needed to create jobs and power Alberta's future.

## **Infrastructure**

While we are building renewable energy infrastructure, we are also building the hospitals, schools, highways and transit that are the lifeblood of the modern economy.

Jurisdictions with the foresight to invest today will be tomorrow's economic leaders.

Last year, shovels were in the ground on nearly 300 transportation projects, more than 100 schools, plus universities, colleges and health facilities.

This year, even more progress will be made on Alberta's historic capital plan, putting thousands of Albertans to work on construction sites, building the infrastructure we need to secure our economic future and way of life.

With interest rates at historic lows, there is simply no better time to get projects built and create good jobs.

## **Protecting Alberta's international trade interests**

This year, action is also being taken to protect Alberta's interests and jobs in a fast-changing global economy.

The Premier just returned from Washington D.C., where she had productive conversations with Members of Congress, officials from the Canadian Embassy, industry representatives, policy experts and others.

Those conversations were grounded in advance work with representatives of key Alberta industries. The Premier and members of cabinet got good advice from industry leaders on how to best approach upcoming trade discussions, with a focus on protecting jobs and seizing new areas of opportunity. These important conversations will continue.

Your government's message to officials in Washington was clear: a strong Alberta contributes to a stronger Canada and a stronger continent.

Your government will continue to work closely with Ottawa and officials in Washington to ensure our shared economic interests are protected and advanced.

In order to bolster and diversify Alberta's trade relationships, additional trade missions will be undertaken this year to key markets across the world, including Japan, India and China.

## **Making life more affordable**

Whether it's selling Alberta to new markets, attracting new investments, building pipelines, or putting Albertans to work on vital infrastructure projects, your government's focus is the same – creating good, family-supporting jobs.

Those good jobs are even better when paycheques go further, and paycheques go further when life is more affordable.

## **Reducing school fees**

Every September, parents across Alberta scramble to cobble together money to pay for a host of school fees. Rather than having a bit extra to put into savings or groceries or their mortgage, parents are forced to redirect their money to pay for education services.

For years, families have said enough is enough, the fees are too much. And yet, school fees have grown and grown.

This session, your government will take a major step forward to make life more affordable for parents and families by eliminating instructional supply and material fees at Alberta's public schools.

Your government will also eliminate busing fees for children travelling to their designated school.

The first bill tabled this session will start that work, by eliminating these fee categories in time for the start of the next school year.

These changes will reduce total mandatory school fees by approximately 25 per cent. Work to further reduce school fees for families will continue.

## **Capping electricity rates**

But that is far from the only step your government is taking to help protect the family budget and make life better.

This year, your government is capping electricity rates for families and businesses – because an electricity bill isn't a jack-in-the-box.

There is no need for a surprise.

Rates will be capped below the average price families have paid over the last decade. If electricity prices go up past the cap, electricity bills won't. Period.

Legislation will be introduced this session to make this cap the law.

## **Energy efficiency**

Not only will energy bills be capped, but tools will be made available to bring energy bills down.

Your government will help families, businesses, non-profits, farmers, municipalities and Indigenous communities save money and increase energy efficiency with programs to



support more energy-efficient appliances, heating, lighting and more.

In addition, your government will make it more affordable to install solar panels on homes, supporting jobs and growth in Alberta's residential solar industry and helping families power their homes with more green energy.

All the while, carbon levy rebates will continue going right to the bank accounts of two-thirds of Alberta households.

## **Protecting consumers**

But to protect the pocketbooks of families, your government is not stopping there.

We banned door-to-door energy sales and put an end to predatory payday lending. This year, your government will take further action to protect consumers and give them more peace of mind.

Also in this session, your government will make consumer protection laws in Alberta stronger and introduce a Consumer Bill of Rights.

## **Strong support for health care and education**

Focusing on jobs and affordability helps to make life better for families. So too does a focus on other fundamentals, such as high-quality public services.

This year, your government will build on its plan to protect and enhance health care, education and the public services families in Alberta count on every day.

### **Strong public education**

Albertans want their children and grandchildren to fulfil their potential and realize their dreams.

It's for this reason that generations of Albertans built a strong public education system to provide our children with tools they need to lead productive and happy lives.

It's for this reason that through the economic downturn your government has made classroom education a top priority, including reversing planned cuts that would have taken teachers out of the classroom.

Through the *Future Ready* initiative, we are freezing tuition, working with parents to modernize our curriculum, expanding access to student loans, and investing in more apprenticeship and training.

This year, in addition to eliminating certain school fees, your government will continue to provide stable, predictable funding to our schools, universities, colleges and institutes,

and will announce the approval and construction of new schools.

## **Strong public health care**

At the same time as we are improving education across the province, we are also improving health care.

Modern new hospitals are being built, such as the new cancer building in Calgary, and services at rural health centres are expanding, such as the one in Sylvan Lake.

But hospitals aren't the only answer. We can deliver more care in our communities.

This year, your government is partnering with the Alberta Medical Association to help communities find and retain the health-care professionals they need, both in rural and urban areas, and especially in under-served communities.

New ways to pay doctors are being developed, ways that support them in spending more time with each patient.

Taken together, these initiatives mean families spend less time on the highway and in the waiting room, and more time with a medical professional who knows them.

Your government will continue to create new long-term care and dementia spaces, and offer more home care services to help seniors live safely in their homes and communities.

We will make life better for vulnerable Albertans by putting nurse practitioners on the frontlines to care for homeless women and youth in Calgary and Edmonton.

We will invest in mental health care, with specific programs for youth, for children and families, for Albertans who have experienced trauma, and for Indigenous communities.

We will move forward with supervised consumption services and other harm-reduction measures to address the rising tragedy of opioid overdose deaths.

Above all, we will maintain a stable, dependable health care system that Albertan families can rely upon to make their lives better.

## **Protecting people, workers and families**

For Alberta's youngest and most vulnerable, more needs to be done to help struggling families thrive and to make sure every child has a safe home.

When a child's home isn't safe, we have a responsibility to step in and do whatever it takes to make sure kids are protected.

Child protection is one of the most important services any government can provide, and we owe it to our children to get it right.

It is for this reason your government created a new department to focus on services for children and launched an all-party Ministerial Panel on Child Intervention.

Building on the work of that panel, your government will introduce new legislation focused on ensuring child death reviews receive the utmost care and attention.

Your government will also build on our work to better help and protect victims of sexual and domestic violence with the introduction of legislation that eliminates barriers to pursuing justice.

For Albertans with disabilities, more work will be done to provide timelier, more accessible services.

More work will also be done this year to modernize working conditions for Albertans.

For low-income families in need of housing, your government will continue to address long-overdue repairs of the affordable housing units we already have, and we will build more units for families and seniors in need.

Hundreds of thousands of families will continue receiving the Alberta Child Benefit and the enhanced Alberta Family and Employment Tax Credit to ensure that children get a good start in life.

This year, your government will also make further progress on its commitment to \$25 per-day child care.

Bids to create or expand new affordable and innovative child-care centres will be awarded in the coming weeks.

Your government will also continue to make sure Alberta's lowest-paid workers – most of whom are women, and many of whom are parents – get a modest and predictable raise, staying on track to fulfil our commitment to increase the minimum wage to \$15 an hour.

## **Supporting local government**

In addition to creating jobs, making life more affordable, and supporting strong public services, this year your government will take further measures to support communities and families.

Important work remains this session on the *Modernized Municipal Government Act*.

This work will build on the strong, respectful relationships developed with municipal leaders.

Those relationships have allowed us to bring in new measures that empower local governments, enabling them to provide their communities with better services and more

jobs.

Your government, the City of Edmonton and the City of Calgary will also continue to work together to create city charters, with a view toward building stronger, more vibrant cities that attract trade, investment and jobs.

## **Working with indigenous communities**

Important work remains to improve relations with Indigenous communities and people.

To date, the Alberta government has signed new relationship agreements with Treaty Eight and the Metis Nation of Alberta. This year your government will pursue further agreements.

When it comes to ensuring that First Nations communities have access to safe drinking water, our country has a shameful record.

Many First Nations communities in Alberta currently have boil water advisories and have for some time. This is unacceptable.

Indigenous people in Alberta need to see concrete action that makes their lives better.

Working with First Nations and the federal government, your government will address the critical need for access to clean drinking water on reserves, thereby making real progress on fulfilling the principles of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

## **Protecting our natural heritage**

As we work to create better conditions for communities across Alberta, we also have a responsibility to protect our extraordinary natural heritage.

Albertans love to hike, fish, hunt, and enjoy our natural beauty.

This year, your government will continue to improve parks across our province and build on the historic protections we have brought into place, such as the recently announced protections for the Castle area.

Consultations on the plan to protect the Castle area will continue this year, as will your government's commitment to create better opportunities for everyone to enjoy our parks. Investments will be made in new campgrounds, trails and roads, and we will support all types of recreation with real improvements to our parks – whether you are exploring on a motorized vehicle, horseback or lacing up hiking boots.

Alberta's natural beauty is part of the wealth we all inherited, and that natural inheritance must be protected and passed on for future generations to enjoy.

## **Strengthening our democracy**

Finally, to make life better for families, we will continue to strengthen our democratic institutions.

To date, your government has taken big money out of politics and enacted an ambitious democratic reform agenda.

This session, that work continues.

New measures will be introduced to expand protection for whistleblowers and to strengthen our conflict of interest laws.

## **Conclusion – working to make life better**

Friends:

Grit built this province.

Grit will build its future.

That future is in the hands of us all: farmers, teachers, oil workers, nurses, welders, entrepreneurs, public servants, and so many others – everyone who made the decision to call this northern slice of the continent their home and never looked back.

As a province, we have had our ups and downs.

But we have always been at our best when we are focused on what matters.

Two years ago oil prices collapsed.

It hurt – badly.

Did Albertans panic? No.

Did we sacrifice the very things that make our province strong? No.

We didn't do those things, because that's not who we are and it wouldn't have solved a thing.

What we did was simple. We got down to work and stayed focused on what matters to everyday Albertans – good jobs, protecting pocketbooks, strong health care and education.

These are the things that count – the things that make life better.

Two years later, our economy is starting to turn the corner.

We are on our way to breaking the land lock, jobs are coming back, our kids have good schools, and our loved ones have the care they need.

Are we there yet? No.

Though the world around us may be growing more uncertain, your government will remain calm and focused.

Now is not the time to let our steady hand waver.

As we have from the start, we will continue to create jobs, diversify our economy, and protect the health and education services on which families rely.

In that work, we will make life better for Alberta families.

Thank you, friends.

God bless Alberta.

God bless Canada.

And God save the Queen.

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## Speech delivered

Her Honour, Lois Mitchell,  
Lieutenant Governor  
Thursday, March 2, 2017  
Alberta legislature

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