

Speech from the Throne: March 8, 2018

The fourth session of the 29th legislature opened with a speech from the throne delivered by Her Honour, Lois Mitchell, CM, AOE, LLD, Lieutenant Governor of Alberta.

International Women's Day

Fellow Albertans, welcome to this, the first day of the new session of your legislature.

We gather today on the traditional territory of Treaty Six and acknowledge the Métis people of Alberta, who share a deep connection with this land.

I also want to acknowledge that today is International Women's Day.

In the halls above this chamber are tributes to Alberta's Famous Five, whose historic win ensured that many Canadian women were considered persons.

Much later, Indigenous women won that same recognition.

Throughout our history, women in Alberta have done great things.

Women such as Beverley McLachlin, a brilliant and proud Albertan, who left her mark on her country and our Supreme Court as Chief Justice.

Alberta women won medals for our country in six events at the recent Olympics.

Alberta was the first province in Canada to have a cabinet where the majority of ministers are women.

On this International Women's Day, we recognize these successes and more.

Women's rights are human rights, and your government celebrates them.

Saluting Alberta's heroes

As citizens of Alberta, people who proudly celebrate one another, we also defend one another.

When tested, Albertans come through for each other.

Again this past year we were tested, by terror in our capital and fire in our south.

Again, Albertans stepped up to defend one another.

We saw that in the brave and selfless efforts of James Hargrave, a volunteer firefighter tragically lost battling a wildfire near Hilda, and in the unbreakable resolve of Const. Mike Chernyk of the Edmonton police, who protected his neighbours when their lives were threatened.

On behalf of all Albertans, thank you.

And to the family of Mr. Hargrave, our deep condolences for your loss.

Courage, resilience, generosity and openness are found in every corner of our province.

When we're down, we help each other up.

And we know that no matter who we are, however we worship, where we come from, or who we love, we are stronger when we look out for one another.

Ensuring Canadian tidewater access for Alberta energy

That applies to Canada, too.

Albertans fuel the economic strength of this great country.

We are hard-working people who create wealth and jobs across Canada.

We are forward-looking people who know climate change requires us to look out for the world we leave for the next generation.

And we are practical people, united in the conviction that a new pipeline to the Canadian coast must be built and our landlock must end.

Canada's decades-long inability to diversify our export markets is holding us back, all of us.

Billions of dollars for schools, hospitals and public services have evaporated, thousands of good jobs have been tossed aside, and money that should be in the pockets of working Canadians has been redirected south of our border.

The dispute British Columbia triggered with its attack on Canadian workers will not stand.

We won't let it.

We have been vigilant in defending our workers and we will remain vigilant.

When the City of Burnaby tried to block the Trans Mountain Pipeline in court, your government intervened.

When the Government of British Columbia tried to overstep its authority and regulate something it has no right to regulate, your government stepped up.

We shut down talks about electricity sales to British Columbia, talks that could have meant up to \$500 million per year for them.

We banned British Columbia wine from Alberta shelves and we brought together a task force of experts and notable Canadians to provide us with the best advice.

Those measures were effective in getting British Columbia to back away from the illegal point in their plan, and effective in making sure all Canadians knew our resolve.

We refuse to let anyone turn their backs on the thousands upon thousands of working people in our energy sector.

Some people have asked how far we are willing to go.

Today, we reaffirm we will do whatever it takes.

In the past, when workers in our energy industry were attacked and when the resources we own were threatened, Premier Peter Lougheed took bold action.

Your government has been clear: Every option is on the table.

We will not hesitate to invoke similar legislation if it becomes necessary owing to extreme and illegal actions on the part of the B.C. government to stop the pipeline.

Make no mistake, Alberta has no desire to take this step, but it is important that B.C. and the country know that we will do whatever it takes to make sure our constitutional rights are respected as partners in Confederation.

Albertans are united.

We will remain united.

Together, we will get this pipeline built.

Choices made during the downturn

The last few years have underscored our need to diversify our markets and diversify our economy.

When your government was first elected, we inherited an economy in free fall.

The boom had ended and the bust had just begun. But this bust was unlike others that had come before. Different not only for its severity, but in how we chose to respond – by working to make life better and putting the priorities of regular people first.

We did not rest idle or turn our backs on the day-to-day needs of people and families.

Based on the solid advice of David Dodge, the former Governor of the Bank of Canada, we invested in bricks and mortar, tarmac and rails, and put Albertans to work building our province.

A new cancer centre is being built in Calgary. In Edmonton's growing south side we are planning a new hospital. Both will serve patients and families for generations.

After years of overcrowding, hundreds of new schools have either been built or are under construction. More will be announced this year.

In the Industrial Heartland, new petrochemical plants are on the way.

Better highways, bridges and overpasses are being built across Alberta.

The construction of the Green Line in Calgary is the largest public infrastructure project in the city's history. It will create tens of thousands of jobs and when complete it will serve more than 60,000 people every day.

Not only did these efforts help rebuild and re-energize our cities and towns, these efforts supported and created tens of thousands of jobs for Albertans when those jobs were needed most.

With our plan working and the private sector regaining strength, your government will again act on the advice of Mr. Dodge and bring the level of public sector capital spending down.

But make no mistake, unlike previous years where infrastructure announcements were made in front of empty fields that would remain empty indefinitely, the projects your government has already announced will be built.

Things are looking up

The cumulative impact of making different choices is paying off.

Although there is more work to do to make sure each and every Albertan benefits from the recovery, things are looking up.

Our province is leading Canada in economic growth.

Our economy is diversifying.

Almost 90,000 people have found a new, full-time job over the last year.

Signs that things are looking up don't stop there.

Manufacturing is up. Housing starts, exports and retail sales are up. So too is drilling activity and earnings.

We steered our way through the recession by focusing on the fundamentals – good jobs, day-to-day affordability, and public services people and families can rely on.

Now that the economic recovery is here, we will keep our focus on the priorities of regular people.

This time, the economic recovery will be built to last.

It's to that plan that we now turn our attention.

Diversifying our economy

Albertans want off the resource royalty roller-coaster.

Rather than sitting back and hoping for the best, your government's main priority for this legislative session will be to further diversify our economy and build a more resilient future.

Thankfully, we are not starting from a standstill.

Action already taken is paying off.

More workers are finding more jobs in manufacturing, tourism and renewable energy.

This is encouraging, but more can and must be done.

With the economy looking up, now is the time to help more Albertans find jobs in new areas of opportunity.

Toward that end, three bills will be aimed at diversifying our economy.

The first bill will focus on diversification within the energy sector. As we work to diversify the markets our energy resources can access via pipeline, we will also do more to add value to our resources right here at home.

The second bill will focus on diversification across our economy.

The third bill will focus on laying the groundwork for new renewable energy jobs and an electricity system with more stable prices.

Let's look at each of those measures in turn.

Diversifying our energy sector

We begin with our traditional strengths in the energy sector.

Guided in part by the advice of the Energy Diversification Advisory Committee, your government will act boldly to help the industry innovate and diversify.

We believe the public sector can and should help foster the next generation of technology in our energy sector.

Through Bill 1, The Energy Diversification Act, Alberta will support the commercialization of the partial upgrading of our bitumen.

This will increase the number of refineries that can accept our energy resources, increase pipeline capacity by removing the need for diluent for some of our exports, and create good jobs.

In addition, we will embark on the second phase of petrochemical diversification to further broaden our recovery and further diversify our economy.

The first phase exceeded expectations. We received nearly double the number of applications we expected. Taken together, those applications represented more than \$20 billion in potential investment in Alberta.

We want to seize that investment potential and build on this success with more petrochemical plants, plants that will employ more Albertans and put more of our feedstock to use in new and prosperous ways.

And when it comes to that feedstock, we will work with industry to incentivize investment in new straddle plants to separate high-value natural gas liquids from Alberta natural gas, creating jobs in value-added industries, diversifying our products and our markets.

These measures are not one-off fixes. They are part of a long-term plan to put our province on a more diversified and resilient economic footing.

Diversifying through education, training and business development

While your government works to diversify our traditional strengths, we will also diversify by helping other sectors of our economy grow.

The second bill your government will table before this legislature will be The Growth and Diversification Act.

This act will expand existing tax credits, introduce new tax credits, place major resources behind education and training and help make post-secondary education more affordable.

We will extend the Capital Investment and Alberta Investor Tax credits to help businesses grow and expand.

We will also support job creation in digital industries with a new Digital Industries Tax Credit.

This act will also create thousands of new spaces in our post-secondary institutions dedicated to technology – an investment that will enable more Albertans to get the education and training they need to get good jobs in this growing sector.

At the same time, we will continue to make post-secondary education costs here more competitive with costs elsewhere. The tuition freeze will be continued, saving students up to \$1,500 on a four-year degree. To keep education affordable and to protect the gains we have made on behalf of students and families, any future tuition increase will be capped by law.

To make education more accessible and affordable in northwest and central Alberta, colleges in Grande Prairie and Red Deer will begin their path to becoming degree-granting institutions.

Diversifying our electricity sector

Your government will create new jobs and protect people from wild electricity price swings.

Since Alberta's electricity system was deregulated, families, businesses and investors have been subject to volatile electricity costs. That volatility was keeping investors on the sidelines.

At the same time, the electricity system generated harmful air pollution, with Alberta burning more coal than every other province combined.

We had a choice.

We could change nothing, and leave families exposed to price spikes.

We could change nothing, and leave our health and environment exposed to pollution.

Or we could act to make sure consumers have more predictable bills, investors have more certainty, and our electricity mix is diversified into wind, solar and natural gas.

We chose to act.

Last year, Alberta's renewable energy auction secured new renewable energy at the lowest cost in Canadian history.

This year, we will see more low-cost renewables and more work to make sure communities across Alberta, including Indigenous communities, see the economic benefits.

We will also lay the groundwork for a more stable electricity system by introducing legislation to create a capacity market.

Our province needs billions of dollars in new investment to keep our electricity reliable and efficient. A capacity market will enable us to get the new, low-cost electricity supply Alberta will need to power our long-term economic prosperity.

The old model relied on squeezing consumers to attract investors.

The new model will attract investors through stability and reliability.

While we take the time to implement a new, more stable system, our electricity price cap will continue to protect consumers from the sudden price spikes they've endured since deregulation.

As Canada moves toward cleaner ways to generate electricity, we will support the communities that have powered our province for generations.

We have made sure some coal plants are able to convert to natural gas. We are helping coal workers with a \$40-million fund to support training, retirement security and economic development.

Taken together, these efforts will help further smooth out the bumps between boom and bust, diversifying our economy into green energy and green energy jobs, and help make sure this economic recovery works for working people.

Path back to balance

Another legacy of our province's boom-and-bust history is wild government spending swings, swings that created uncertainty for people.

When your government was first elected, we outlined a plan that invested in people when times were bad, but which would also return to a path to balance when times were better.

Key to that plan is smoothing out those spending swings and making sure our schools, hospitals and public service providers can count on stable, predictable funding.

Last week, we released our third-quarter update.

Coupled with an improving economy, the deficit is lower than projected, in keeping with the plan to which we have been working.

In the coming weeks, we will release our budget.

It will show that our economy continues to grow and diversify.

It will also show that as we move toward a balanced budget, our dependence on non-renewable resource revenue will be lower than what it has been historically.

The path to balance will also require working in partnership with the public sector to reduce costs.

The people who work across our public sector are integral to the services Albertans rely on. We have already reached practical agreements with no raises and better job stability with many labour partners, including teachers and nurses, and a tentative agreement has been reached with our allied health professionals, such as paramedics, lab technologists and X-ray technologists.

We have also extended the pay freeze that covers all government managers for two more years, while also expanding its reach.

At the same time, your government is committed to making sure taxes on people and businesses remain the lowest in Canada.

Making government work for people

As we stay on track to balance the budget, we will continue to make sure your government puts regular people first.

That means getting rid of long-standing executive perks and insider excess, all of which have been paid for by the many, but enjoyed by the few.

We have significantly reduced hospitality and travel costs and eliminated ridiculous perks like taxpayer-funded golf club memberships for well-paid executives of public bodies.

We will continue to reduce salaries for executives and board members.

Building on our work to reduce exorbitant salaries in government agencies, boards and commissions – work that has seen salaries cut significantly, with some executives seeing their salaries cut to the tune of hundreds of thousands of dollars a year – we will now focus on our post-secondary institutions.

We owe it to our students to ensure that funding for education goes where it belongs – the classroom.

We will also continue our work to take big money out of politics.

The days of union and corporate donations are done. Strict spending and contribution limits are now in force and new accountability measures for third-party advertising have been put into law.

To further assure Albertans that their government is working for them – not for insiders, not for campaign donors and not for special interests – this session we will also act on the advice of an all-party committee and reform Alberta's lobbyist laws.

Protecting Albertans from crime

Across Alberta, from our rural communities to our urban centres, every Albertan deserves to feel safe.

Today in Alberta, especially in rural areas, people are concerned for the safety of their homes, their property and the well-being of those they love.

That must change.

Your government invests more than half a billion dollars annually into police services across the province. Our police officers serve and protect Albertans with a bravery and dedication that is unmatched.

Yet, more can be done to protect people and property and help Albertans feel safe.

Together with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, we have developed new initiatives to combat rural crime.

The focus will be to act on the advice of our police and law enforcement experts, including specific measures to better address the challenges of policing in rural communities and new measures to make sure people who refuse to obey the law are held to account. This includes investing in new bait-and-tracking technology, including technology related to farm equipment, new measures to help police spend less time on paperwork and more time on the street, and putting boots on the ground where they're needed most to protect families.

Working with Indigenous people

When your government was first elected, we made a government-wide commitment to make sure that the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples was respected in all policy deliberations.

Your government is working to keep that promise and it is paying dividends. Initiatives such as affordable housing for Indigenous people living off reserve, the Climate Leadership Plan, the Renewable Energy Program, the curriculum review, work to better

protect children in care, and more, have all been strengthened because they engaged Indigenous people and their interests in a constructive and practical dialogue.

We recently finished consultations with the people who were robbed of their families, communities and language during the Sixties Scoop. The purpose of those consultations was to bring their suffering to light and help to reconcile this destructive legacy with a formal apology. Work will continue on this important matter.

We have invested to make sure First Nations communities in Alberta will have the infrastructure necessary to bring safe, clean, reliable drinking water to people. This year, that work continues.

The opioid crisis

The opioid overdose crisis affects the lives of a growing number of Alberta families.

Every affected person has a right to dignity, respect and medical care.

In this session, your government will introduce legislation to ensure safety and quality care in private treatment facilities.

We will provide more public treatment options, more harm reduction services and more public education.

Driven by the best advice, scientific research and evidence on how more lives can be saved, we will expand access to supervised consumption services.

This work will continue to be guided by a diverse and committed Emergency Response Commission that includes public health leaders, law enforcement, community workers and Albertans who have experienced this crisis first-hand.

Addressing inequality

When government fails to work for people, inequality rises.

Since coming to office, your government has ensured that Alberta makes progress in building a fairer province.

Too often, in recoveries of the past, the poor and most vulnerable have been left behind. This time, we will make sure the economic recovery works for everyone.

That is why we have protected funding for our schools, hospitals and the services on which Albertans rely, and it is why we will continue to protect and improve public services.

It is why hundreds of thousands of families have received financial support through the Alberta Child Benefit and the enhanced Alberta Family and Employment Tax Credit.

It is why we have built more affordable housing for people and introduced better supports for seniors.

It is why we have made changes to help protect LGBTQ2S youth, including new guidelines within our housing and homelessness system that are the first of their kind in Canada.

It is why this year we will have a minimum wage of \$15 per hour.

We introduced a new school nutrition program to help kids get a good, healthy meal to start the day. This year, that program will expand.

We pioneered a new, affordable high-quality child-care program so the paycheques of new parents go further. This year, that program will also expand.

Your government will take action in response to the Child Intervention Panel so we can do more to help vulnerable children and to reduce the number of Indigenous children in government care.

More also needs to be done to make sure every Albertan can live to their fullest potential. Accordingly, your government will support our most vulnerable neighbours by improving income support programs.

We are also conducting a review of the Persons with Developmental Disabilities program to determine how best to support persons living with disabilities.

Finally, owing to the bravery and resolve of women speaking out about sexual violence, we are facing up to a reality that unfolds daily in the lives of countless women.

We hear them and we stand with them. That's why we have invested to expand counseling and crisis services so more survivors who take the brave step to come forward have the supports they need.

Looking to the future with optimism

With the economic recovery upon us and as working Albertans get back on their feet, now is the time for unity.

Our task together is to make sure this recovery works for working people. This recovery must be more diverse and long-lasting.

It is time to look to the future with confidence, optimism and the determination to build a more resilient economy, one that puts the economic security of people first.

It is time to build on our traditional strengths and help Albertans seize a broad range of opportunity.

It is time to overcome our landlock.

A new Canadian pipeline to the Canadian coast must be built.

Whatever differences members of this assembly may have, we must move forward united.

Differences over strategy and tactics are healthy, democratic and always encouraged.

At the same time, we must resolve to make sure those differences remain rooted in our love for this great province.

We are Albertans, all of us.

We all want our province to succeed and our citizens to prosper.

Let no one in this chamber, this province or this country cheer for Alberta to fail.

We must stand united in defence of our collective security and well-being.

Together, we will get a pipeline built to the coast.

Together, we will diversify our export markets.

Together, we will unleash the potential of this province and its people.

To those who would say Alberta's best days are behind us, we have proven them wrong and we will continue to prove them wrong.

Alberta's best days will always be ahead when we are home to diverse, talented, hard-working people.

This recovery is proving things can be done differently, and that good things happen when governments proudly stand on the side of working Albertans.

Our task is to make sure this recovery keeps working for working people.

Which is exactly what your government is committed to do.

Thank you, my friends and fellow Albertans.

God bless Alberta.

God bless Canada.

And God save the Queen.

Speech delivered by

Her Honour, Lois Mitchell,
Lieutenant Governor
Thursday, March 8, 2018
Alberta legislature

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