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| Alberta | 28e | 3e | Discours du trône | 17 novembre 2014 | Colonel (Retired) Donald S. Ethell | Lieutenant governor | Alberta Progressive Conservative Party |

My fellow Albertans, welcome to the Third Session of the 28th Alberta Legislature. It is my honour to deliver the Speech from the Throne as Alberta's Lieutenant Governor.

Today we are in the midst of Metis Week. So I begin with a special greeting to Albertans of Metis descent. I invite all Albertans to learn about and celebrate the many contributions of Metis Albertans to our province.

We come here together to serve the people of Alberta — a province that has been blessed beyond all measure with the gifts of abundant natural resources, rich soil that sustains our agriculture and forestry sectors, and the beautiful forests and prairies, lakes and rivers, mountains and foothills that are our natural heritage.

But we value most what Albertans themselves bring to our province: entrepreneurial spirit, hard work and innovation, a commitment to excellence and ethics of compassion and service to others.

As the elected representatives of the people of Alberta, we all share a great responsibility: to capture that promise, and seize the opportunity, so that future Albertans — whether they are born here, or are among the tens of thousands of newcomers who join our province every year — will have the best quality of life possible.

Ladies and gentlemen, your government will do exactly this.

Nine weeks ago, we put Alberta under new management. Our new government understands we will be challenged like never before to balance strong fiscal stewardship and accountability with meeting the needs of a growing province.

Today we are home to just over 4 million people. By 2040, in a little more than a generation, we will be home to more than 6 million. The decisions we make in the next five years must lay the foundation for our prosperity and success for today and for all those future Albertans.

This government is focused on the clear priorities of Albertans — reflecting Albertans' values and ambitions for today while ensuring a strong foundation is set for future generations. Five key principles underline our efforts:

* A focused commitment to sound, conservative fiscal principles;
* Ending entitlements and restoring public trust;
* Maximizing the value of our natural resources and respecting property rights;
* Establishing our province as an environmental leader; and
* Increasing Albertans' quality of life by being a leader in the areas of health, education, seniors' care and skills training.

We will deliver good, prudent government, characterized by accountability and transparency. We will work tirelessly to earn and keep Albertans' trust. We will serve Albertans with the honour and respect they deserve.

We will keep our province on a firm fiscal foundation characterized by balanced budgets; a small Cabinet and a small government; low taxes and no sales tax; a responsible program of capital investment; and a disciplined savings plan.

And we will deliver excellence in all the things Albertans want and need: top quality health care, education and skills training; safe, respectful care for our seniors; modern, efficient roads and infrastructure; vibrant cities and inclusive communities; and a clean, healthy environment.

The government's priorities will be those set by Albertans themselves and the government's actions will reflect Albertans' values. We will always remember that we are here to serve the people of this province.

**A focused commitment to sound, conservative fiscal principles**

Albertans rightly expect their government to use taxpayer dollars wisely and to achieve the best possible outcomes for money spent. This government will deliver — in a manner that is both transparent and accountable to Albertans.

Our province was built on solid conservative fiscal principles that have served Albertans well. However, a budget tied to volatile energy prices imperils our fiscal resilience over the long term. We must align spending with a realistic assessment of the financial capacity we can sustain responsibly, without risking the prosperity of our children and grandchildren.

Your government will be cautious in budgeting, prudent in spending and diligent in saving.

At the same time, Alberta's tremendous population and economic growth have shown us the peril of failing to maintain what we have, and the importance of investing in what we need.

To ensure fiscal prudence and discipline, your government will continue to use conservative revenue forecasts for budget purposes.

The results-based budgeting review will be completed, with a focus on more efficient and effective program delivery. The rate of increase on spending for government operations will be kept below the rate of population growth and inflation.

At the same time, we will protect what is most important to Albertans. Government will maintain a contingency fund to protect priority programs from revenue volatility and to respond to emergencies like flood mitigation.

New emphasis will be placed on better maintaining our assets and on investing to extend the life, use and cost of what we have.

We will pursue opportunities for more innovative delivery of needed provincial capital infrastructure. We will only borrow for capital purposes, never for operations, and only with a clear debt repayment plan in place.

We will introduce a straightforward budget presentation to ensure that Albertans have a clearer understanding of the province's finances, and where and how their taxpayer dollars are being used.

And we will issue a semi-annual update on Alberta's Savings Plan to report to the people of Alberta on the performance of their savings.

**Ending entitlements and restoring the public trust**

Public service is a privilege and the actions of public servants must be guided by this fundamental principle. Your government pledges to honour the trust Albertans have placed in their elected representatives and respect those it serves in everything we do.

A review has already begun of agencies, boards and commissions, to ensure they are performing to the maximum benefit of Albertans.

New accountability legislation and complementary Treasury Board directives will begin to reshape the legislative framework governing ethical standards and accountability measures for those who serve Albertans. Actions here will:

* Strengthen conflict of interest guidelines for political staff;
* Extend cooling-off periods for political staff and senior civil servants;
* Eliminate excessive severance packages for political staff;
* Eliminate sole-sourced contracts in all but exceptional circumstances; and
* Clarify the distinction between the role of registered lobbyists and government consultants.

**Maximizing the value of our natural resources and respecting property rights**

Our province's natural resources are the cornerstone of the strongest and best-performing economy in Canada.

In addition to conventional resources like oil, natural gas and coal, Alberta is rich in renewable resources including biomass, wind, hydro and solar resources. And our natural conditions come together with human ingenuity to make our province a world leader in agricultural production and forestry.

Many people come to Alberta in search of opportunity. And they find it here, in an economy that runs on entrepreneurialism, innovation and hard work. Albertans are truly global citizens, with aspirations and abilities that extend far beyond our province's borders.

But limited access to global markets restricts Alberta's potential — and costs Albertans and Canadians billions of dollars every year, limiting our prosperity and ability to control our economic destiny.

Your government will focus on enhancing market access for all our exports so we can diversify our client base, capture global prices and open Alberta to the widest range of emerging opportunities.

Alberta will focus its efforts on the Asia Pacific region, which holds the greatest potential for growth in exports. Much focused work has been done here, including through the Asia Advisory Council which considered opportunities to expand economic, research, education and cultural opportunities between Alberta and Asia.

There are also emerging opportunities in our traditional market, the United States, and in Europe, where the conclusion of negotiations on the Canada-EU Free Trade Agreement, once ratified, will further open the world's largest market for Alberta's products and services.

Government will develop a focused regional strategy to expand Alberta's presence in key markets, ensure the right supports are in place for exporters, and build the relationships that will underpin long-term, mutually beneficial trade partnerships.

Our success in the 21st century will depend on how well we seize the opportunities that exist in the Asia Pacific region. That is why we will continue to work closely within the New West Partnership — a powerful partnership across British Columbia, Alberta and Saskatchewan representing a market of nearly 10 million people and economies worth half a trillion dollars — to drive national focus toward the urgency of ensuring Canada's market access challenges are addressed.

Yet we have a 20th century export infrastructure preventing Alberta and Canada from realizing its full economic potential. There is a lack of pipeline infrastructure to move energy products to tidewater. There is a shortage of rail capacity to move agriculture, energy and forest products to export terminals. Despite sustained advocacy and multiple World Trade Organization rulings in our favour, mandatory country of origin labelling requirements in the United States continue to be a significant barrier to beef and pork exports into that country.

Your government will continue to work in partnership with other Canadian provinces, territories and the federal government. These efforts will include advocating for expanded export and transportation capacity, whether by truck, air, pipeline or rail, to improve access to all markets, including Atlantic Canada, the West Coast, the Gulf Coast and others.

Alberta will also seek a fundamental renewal of the pan-Canadian Agreement on Internal Trade, in order to achieve a broad, comprehensive agreement that will eliminate trade barriers within our country and create an open, efficient and stable domestic market.

Alberta is also taking steps to support innovation in the development of new products, including value-added opportunities in the resource sector.

Our province already produces high-quality food products, while demonstrating leadership in environmental stewardship, animal welfare, plant health and food safety.

We will make annual investments to enhance agricultural research and innovation, and further develop the food processing industry.

Government has introduced the Rural Economic Development Action Plan and is continuing to implement the Rural Alberta Business Centre to support continued economic growth in rural Alberta.

We are also making investments to support economic growth all over Alberta, beginning with our transportation infrastructure.

Every day, Albertans rely on our provincial highway network to get them to school and work safely. As a province, we also rely on this network to develop our natural resources and get products to market. With over 28,000 kilometres of paved highway and more than 4,000 bridges, we know that proper maintenance and renewal is essential to ensuring that Albertans have safe, reliable travel.

In addition to completing major projects like Highway 63 and the ring roads, we must focus more on rehabilitation, intersection improvement and bridge maintenance and repair — especially across rural Alberta. Investment now means improved safety for the travelling public and less spent replacing aging infrastructure later.

Work continues on the development of a long-term transportation strategy, reflecting public consultations last spring, including the importance of public transit, the need for more free-flow highway corridors and the desire to reduce our environmental footprint.

Market access, product innovation and investments in infrastructure are all key elements of a thriving free market economy. But its foundation must be the recognition and protection of private property.

Private ownership of land is a fundamental and essential principle of our democracy and our economy. This government respects the property rights of Albertans and has heard the strong recommendations provided through the Property Rights Task Force. The introduction of Bill 1 today will begin to foster a culture of respect by acting on what landowners have told us already.

Bill 1 signals the beginning of government's commitment to rebuild relationships with property owners in Alberta.

Other steps that will be taken to strengthen Alberta's economy include new supports for small businesses, and exploring how government can continue to deliver public land titles services in new ways that provide enhanced access for Albertans.

Alberta will also work in partnership with employers, municipalities and the Government of Canada to integrate labour force strategies that provide durable solutions to the challenges of people without jobs and jobs without people.

These will include tackling the mismatch between some of the educational paths Albertans follow and where the jobs are, removing barriers to labour mobility and recognizing that local, national and international workers are crucial to the success of our province.

We will also continue to provide supports for those who are looking for work or who are under-represented in the work force, including people with disabilities.

**Establishing Alberta as an environmental leader**

If we talk about being a leader in the energy, agriculture or forestry business, then we are in the environment business. Our customers expect this, and Albertans themselves demand it. Clean air, fresh water and thriving biodiversity are part of our identity as Albertans and Canadians — something which Alberta shares with visitors from around the world through our exceptional tourism industry.

But we cannot just spread the word on the steps we have already taken. Alberta must take meaningful, effective action to show we are as serious about the environment business as we are about the energy business.

This includes ongoing work with stakeholders and industry on the development of a new tailings management framework and taking action to protect the Athabasca River and its neighbouring ecosystems.

Alberta must build on the leadership that made us the first jurisdiction in North America to regulate greenhouse gas emissions, and among the first to put a price on carbon.

We will bring all parties — industry, environmental groups, Aboriginal groups and all affected impacted Albertans — to the table to find common ground on environmental, economic and social priorities.

In the year ahead, our work will expand through the development of a new climate change framework that will outline strategies to drive emissions reductions.

This means moving increasingly towards lower emissions sources, including natural gas and renewables.

It means ensuring Alberta communities are more resilient to the impacts of a changing climate.

It includes advancing efforts to monitor, measure and report on our progress.

It means pursuing local and global partnerships and alliances to maximize our results. We will ensure that Alberta industry remains competitive, and we will meet the challenge of demonstrating real environmental leadership through meaningful action.

**Enhancing Albertans' quality of life**

Every effort of your government is focused on the fundamental goal of ensuring Albertans have the best quality of life possible.

Albertans want to know that there will be schools for their children, supportive care and services for aging parents and access to high-quality health care for everyone.

They want to know that even while we deliver on fiscal promises, we are focused on ensuring our health and education systems, our communities and cities will be able to meet the needs of our province as it grows to be home for 6 million Albertans.

They want to see smart investment and system improvement — getting full value for the money we do invest, reflected in system improvement across all areas of government.

Nowhere is this need more urgent than in the delivery of their health care. Albertans want a system that is patient-focused and sustainable. They want to see outcomes improve.

We know there is tremendous local knowledge in our communities, and great expertise in our frontline health-care workers. We want to empower health-care providers to have more input into decision-making at the local level. This will take shape through refined relationships with health advisory councils, and through a renewed focus on clinical standards, with input from medical professionals and key stakeholders.

Your government is focused on improving flow into and through the health system through multiple, integrated initiatives. This includes the Continuing Care Capacity Plan that will open 464 existing continuing care spaces and create more than 1,500 new spaces. This is in addition to the 1,400 spaces already set to open between 2016 and 2018.

New continuing care spaces will ensure that seniors and others with complex needs receive the care they need, in safe, comfortable and appropriate settings, while freeing up beds in hospital wards and emergency departments.

Your government is committed to providing the right kind of care and housing options for seniors, at the right time, and as close to home as possible.

Additional work is also underway to address specific challenges within the health system, including patient access, waiting times, the need to speed up the transfer of patients from ambulances, the challenges of rural and remote communities, the availability of mental health supports for Alberta's children and the need to develop a wellness strategy for Albertans.

A good education is the first step to a productive, fulfilling life. Albertans rightly expect excellence in education. Government must focus on providing students with the quality education they will need to thrive in the future.

The recent announcement of 75 school projects brings the three-phase plan for Alberta's school infrastructure to 230 capital projects, creating more than 78,000 new spaces. This is the largest school construction project in Canadian history, and it is essential to keep pace with 10 years of record growth in Alberta's student population.

We are also committed to improving the way we teach and support our students and teachers.

This government will work to ensure that the basics of literacy and numeracy are the foundation for all student learning, from Kindergarten through Grade 12. We will also work to ensure students have opportunities to acquire 21st century competencies such as innovation, communication and collaboration.

We are working with education partners to deliver innovative learning opportunities such as dual credit programming, which allows high school students to develop high-demand skills and get a head start on post-secondary learning or workplace training through one of the many institutions under the Campus Alberta umbrella.

Your government will work with post-secondary institutions to meet our province's need for skilled entrepreneurs, professionals, researchers and workers.

We are exploring new ways to strengthen the system that will allow all learners to access and transfer within Campus Alberta. Innovation investments will be aligned to better support and encourage innovative thinking and revenue generation within the Campus Alberta system.

We will also target supports for apprentices, low-income, northern and Aboriginal learners — all of whom have a vital role to play in ensuring the growing need for skilled workers across Alberta.

Excelling in health, education, seniors care and skills training means investing in the structures these systems need.

Government is broadening the planning horizon for its capital plan with the development of a five-year intermediate plan and a 25-year long-term plan. These will ensure priority needs will be met in an orderly and cost-effective way.

We also recognize the need to take care of the infrastructure that is already in place and have begun to deal with the maintenance backlog using a planned and deliberate approach.

To ensure transparency and accountability, your government will introduce regular, twice-yearly report cards on the status of infrastructure projects across the province. The first will be tabled in the Legislature during this session.

Strong, modern, culturally vibrant cities and municipalities are at the heart of our province.

Your government will provide Alberta municipalities with a solid foundation for growth. We will continue to provide significant, predictable funding to support local infrastructure and services through the Municipal Sustainability Initiative.

We will review the Municipal Government Act, working in partnership with the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association, the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties, all of our other municipal partners and other stakeholders.

And we will build on the recent signing of the framework agreement with Edmonton and Calgary, and work with both municipalities to achieve the key milestones in the framework by spring of 2016.

Your government is also focused on being better partners to Aboriginal communities - including those living in urban Alberta. Aboriginal people have important contributions to make to our cities, but sometimes the transition from rural or isolated communities to urban centres can be challenging.

Your government will work directly with First Nations, Metis and Inuit communities along with urban Aboriginal organizations and federal and municipal governments to develop and support initiatives to ease transitions to urban centres and into new opportunities.

We will devote new energy to addressing the unacceptable gaps in education achievement between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students by building partnerships and support for First Nations, Metis and Inuit people to use their skills, knowledge and perspectives in the work force.

In addition, a new bill will be introduced to improve protection for condo owners and buyers, improve transparency and accountability of condo boards, and create a faster, more affordable dispute resolution system.

Your government will work with the Premier's Council on Culture to develop a culture plan to promote sustainability and long-term growth across Alberta's vibrant arts and culture sector.

And work on a new volunteerism strategy will commence to ensure that our province's non-profit and voluntary sector, comprising almost 25,000 charities and organizations, remains strong in its exceptional contributions to Albertans' quality of life.

Your government is also working to ensure children, low-income Albertans, and others who are vulnerable, are protected.

Changes in the justice system will put the needs of children and families first through reforms focusing on early and final resolution of disputes, and by improving the efficiency of the Maintenance Enforcement Program. Legal Aid funding is being increased to allow more low-income Albertans, including AISH recipients, to access the justice system.

From pre-natal to young adult, plans are underway to support young Albertans by tackling youth homelessness under the 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness, and through the Early Years Strategy. They will provide important supports for Alberta's children and youth, helping them transition between community systems and support services to healthy adulthood.

Finally, for the many Alberta communities that are still recovering from the 2013 flooding, government is taking immediate action to resolve outstanding Disaster Recovery Program appeals before the end of this year.

A comprehensive flood mitigation plan will include the construction of a south diversion of the Highwood River and a dry reservoir near Springbank. These are components of a program that ensures Alberta communities are better protected from future flooding through solutions that are affordable, environmentally defensible and quickly actionable.

**Conclusion**

Ladies and gentlemen, this is your government's plan for Alberta.

It begins with the understanding that government's role is to serve Albertans — honorably, respectfully and ethically. Government's priorities must be those set by Albertans themselves.

It follows that our province must remain on a firm fiscal foundation, characterized by the sound, conservative fiscal principles that have served Alberta well.

We must make the most of the many natural gifts bestowed on Alberta…and through wise management and hard work, turn the blessings we have been given into long-lasting security and prosperity.

We must act now, and act together, to conserve our greatest gift of all: the natural splendour, majesty and beauty of Alberta.

And we must work together, thoughtfully and deliberately, to preserve and enhance the tremendous quality of life enjoyed by Albertans. This is a precious legacy handed down to us from those who built our province. And it is our most solemn duty, in turn, to bestow what we received on our own children and grandchildren, and everyone who will one day call this great province home.

This is your government's commitment to this Assembly, and to all Albertans.

Thank you, ladies and gentlemen.

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