

February 4, 2010

Steps to boost competitiveness, improve health care detailed in Throne Speech

Legislative agenda to focus on economy, passing the budget to keep Alberta on "road to recovery"

Edmonton... Plans to bolster Alberta's competitiveness in the global economy and improve health care were the highlights of the Speech from the Throne, delivered by Lieutenant Governor Norman L. Kwong on February 4.

"Our government understands that competitiveness is about managing our spending and ensuring that regulation is effective and practical," said Premier Ed Stelmach. "But it's also about protecting our environment, and maintaining the services and quality of life Albertans deserve."

Bill 1 of the legislative session, the *Alberta Competitiveness Act*, brings together several initiatives to make Alberta the most competitive jurisdiction in North America, including maintaining and growing export markets, fostering value-added opportunities in the agriculture and agri-food industry, and ensuring that the energy sector remains vibrant and able to attract investment.

On health, the government committed to act on the recommendations of the Minister's Advisory Committee and provide stable five-year funding to Alberta Health Services.

Other highlights of the throne speech include government's plans to:

- bolster the front lines of Alberta police forces with 100 new officers;
- launch a new vision for education;
- keep using the Sustainability Fund to protect municipalities, social programs, educational institutions and the health care system;
- continue to invest in research and technology solutions to environmental challenges posed by oil sands development, including the eventual elimination of tailings ponds; and
- seek fair treatment for Albertans under universal federal programs.

The government's legislative agenda this session will be focused on the economy and passing the budget so Alberta can continue on the road to recovery, said Government House Leader Dave Hancock.

"After the spring sitting concludes, MLAs will be engaging with their constituents throughout the spring and summer on key issues such as health and education," Hancock said.

The full text of the 2010 Speech from the Throne is available online at www.alberta.ca.

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Backgrounders: Highlights of the 2010 Speech from the Throne
Bills for Spring 2010 Legislative Sitting

Media inquiries may be directed to:

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Highlights of the 2010 Speech from the Throne

The following are highlights of initiatives laid out in the February 2010 Speech from the Throne.

Alberta's Fiscal Advantage

- Use our carefully planned fiscal advantages, including low taxes and the nearly \$25 billion that was saved and invested during good times, to position Alberta for a strong recovery.
- Keep using the Sustainability Fund to protect municipalities, social programs, educational institutions and the health care system.
- Continue to strengthen infrastructure in all regions of the province.
- Introduce Alberta Capital Bonds with proceeds directed to building seniors' accommodations.
- Carefully manage government spending, with a focus on key priorities such as health, education and supports for vulnerable Albertans.

Improving Health Care

- Act on the recommendations of the Minister's Advisory Committee on Health to make the publicly funded health system more patient-focused.
- Create a new Alberta Health Act.
- Engage Albertans in the on-going evolution of the health system.
- Provide stable, five-year funding to Alberta Health Services.
- Focus on better performance in key areas such as wait times and access.
- Seek input from, and be accountable to, Albertans on whether the health system is performing to their expectations.

Building Safe, Caring Communities

- Address gang crime through the Alberta Gang Reduction Strategy.
- Table witness protection legislation.
- Bolster the front lines of Alberta police forces with 100 new officers.
- Meet government's goal of creating 14,000 new child care spaces.
- Work with partners to develop 11,000 affordable housing units by 2012, and act on the Ten-Year Plan to End Homelessness.
- Better integrate social programs to improve service to clients.
- Continue to advocate for reforms to the retirement income system, and if necessary, join with BC and Saskatchewan to develop options for a regional retirement income plan.

Increasingly Competitive in a Global Economy

- Launch a new vision for education.
- Strengthen the province's research and innovation system.
- Ensure that the workforce has the right skills to keep Alberta strong.
- Continue to work with the federal government to expand direct air access between Alberta and its key markets.
- Invest in new transportation infrastructure to support economic growth in the North.
- Work toward a Western Economic Partnership with BC and Saskatchewan to create

- Canada's largest boundary-free trade and investment market.
- Work with BC and Saskatchewan on a joint trade mission to China and Japan.
 - Ensure that government regulation is both clear and practical.
 - Complete the review of the First Nations Consultation Policy and Guidelines on Land Management and Resource Development.
 - Increase Alberta's competitive edge in agriculture and agri-food by fostering value-added opportunities and increasing access to important international markets.
 - Ensure the energy industry continues to attract investment and create new technologies.
 - Ensure that Alberta is an attractive place to do business, guided by the findings of the competitiveness review.
 - Introduce Bill 1, the *Alberta Competitiveness Act*, to signal government's resolve to make Alberta the most competitive jurisdiction in North America.
 - Continue to work on a world-class, integrated petrochemical hub, drawing on the raw materials from the oil sands and accelerated by the bitumen royalty-in-kind policy, to add value to Alberta's resources in Alberta.

A Clean Energy Future

- Continue the fight against the mountain pine beetle.
- Work with Ottawa to reach a continental approach to controlling greenhouse gas emissions.
- Develop new opportunities to participate in markets like China and India, while securing access to the emerging clean energy market in the U.S.
- Continue to promote Alberta and the technological advances Alberta industries have made in environmental management, such as their work on carbon capture and storage.
- Continue to invest in research and technology solutions to environmental challenges posed by oil sands development, including the eventual elimination of tailings ponds.

Alberta's Place in Canada

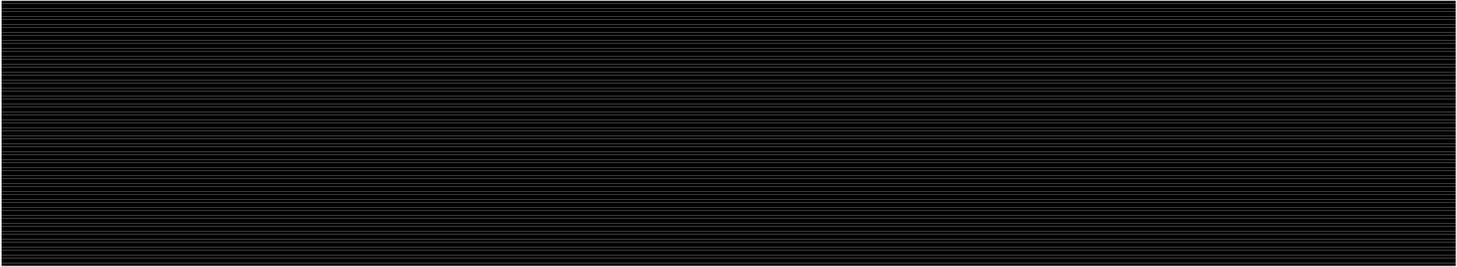
- Seek fair treatment for Albertans under universal federal programs.
- Use expert advice from the Premier's Council on Economic Strategy to set a path to a secure and prosperous future for Albertans.
- Share Alberta's story at the Olympics, and elsewhere on the global stage, to promote our province.
- Continue to build world-class universities of the 21st century.

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Bills for Spring 2010 Legislative Sitting

The following bills will be introduced this spring.

Bill 1 - *Alberta Competitiveness Act, 2010 (Finance and Enterprise)*

The act elevates competitiveness across the province for government, industry and businesses. It aims to improve and increase partnerships between the government and industry, which will help enhance the province's business environment and sharpen Alberta's competitive edge in a global economy.

Professional Statutes Amendment Act, 2010 (Employment and Immigration)

The act governing professional associations will be amended to include a clause requiring professional regulatory organizations to consult with the ministers responsible for their governing legislation and the *Post Secondary Learning Act*, and to consider their comments prior to the removal or approval of a program of study or educational course from their registration requirements. While government encourages continued education for Albertans, the inclusion of these clauses is intended to address the potential for over-qualification which may be unnecessary for an individual to perform the work.

Securities Amendment Act, 2010 (Finance and Enterprise)

Amendments to the legislation will lay the groundwork for regulation of credit rating agencies, help Alberta businesses prepare for the switch to new accounting standards in 2011 and further protect Alberta investors by broadening the Alberta Securities Commission's power to deal with faulty disclosure by issuers. The amendments will also continue Alberta's work to harmonize and streamline securities laws and registration requirements with other provinces and territories.

Elections Statutes Amendment Act, 2010 (Justice and Attorney General)

This bill will amend the *Elections Act* and the *Elections Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act*. These amendments were developed in response to recommendations for improvement from the office of the Chief Electoral Officer (CEO). The amendments will update and streamline how provincial elections are held and ensure those involved in electoral campaigning and advertising are properly handling financial contributions and required reporting to the Office of the CEO.

Fatal Accidents Amendment Act, 2010 (Justice and Attorney General)

The *Fatal Accidents Act* awards a set amount of damages for bereavement to a surviving spouse, adult interdependent partner, parent or child of a deceased person. The proposed amendments would make eligibility for bereavement damages less restrictive by removing references to marital status and would remove the reference to a child as including an "illegitimate" child.

Witness Security Act, 2010 (Justice and Attorney General)

The proposed legislation would complement the current federal witness protection program by establishing a provincial witness security program tailored to the particular needs of Alberta's justice system, thereby providing another tool for the Crown and local police agencies to provide security for witnesses. Witness protection is an accepted tool in the investigation and prosecution of gang related crimes in cases where witnesses feel apprehensive to provide testimony in court.

Local Authorities Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2010 (Municipal Affairs)

Proposed amendments are required to clarify the rules of residency for local government elections; and in response to Bill 203 (*Local Authorities Election (Finance and Contribution Disclosure) Amendment Act, 2009*) amend certain provisions to ensure alignment between the *Local Authorities Amendment Election Act* and the *Municipal Government Act*.

Emergency Management Amendment Act, 2010 (Municipal Affairs)

Proposed amendments to the *Emergency Management Act* will promote greater inter-municipal cooperation and collaboration; improve liability protection for search and rescue members, their organizations and other emergency partners who provide emergency services under the legislation. It will clarify responsibility for property destruction or damage due to emergency mitigation, and enhance the emergency management system across the province.

Dangerous Goods Transportation and Handling Amendment Act, 2010 (Transportation)

The *Dangerous Goods Transportation and Handling Act* is dependent on recent amendments to the federal *Transportation of Dangerous Goods Act, 1992*. The provincial legislation harmonizes, as much as possible, with the federal legislation to achieve consistent requirements for both the intra-provincial and extra-provincial movement of dangerous goods.

Proposed amendments will support the safety and security of shipments of particular dangerous goods by requiring security plans for certain prescribed dangerous goods and clarifying requirements related to the manufacture and use of containers used to transport dangerous goods, and for the reporting of dangerous goods that are lost or stolen during transport.

Additional bills will be forthcoming this sitting, pending approval of caucus.

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