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Highlights of Alberta's New Program

AN ADDRESS BY
HON. E. C. MANNING
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Hon. E. C. Manning:

Good Evening, Ladies and Gentlemen:

In the weeks ahead I want to discuss with you many matters of importance not only that you may know what your government is doing on your behalf but that we, in turn, may have the benefit and help of your criticisms and advice.

For some time I have felt we should re-examine our provincial programs which have been in effect for years. In this progressive province circumstances change constantly and government policies must be revised periodically to keep them in line with changing conditions. Accordingly, since the last session my colleagues and I have been working on a comprehensive new program for a new generation of Albertans. We have revised and up-dated many policies to meet the new circumstances and the modern viewpoints and desires which you frequently have expressed. Last week I discussed these proposals with the government Members of the legislature. We made further improvements in the light of the viewpoints they placed on your behalf. Tonight I want to outline some of the highlights of this new program. I will deal with others on future telecasts. I want you to be fully informed as to what we propose well ahead of the session to give you time to tell us if these proposals meet with your approval before they are enacted into law. This is the way democracy should work.

Here, then, are some of the highlights of our new program for modern Alberta and its new generation of progressive people. In the first place we want to give new meaning to the fundamental principle that the proper function of a democratic government is to give the people it serves the results they want from the management of their

public affairs. To this end, we propose to simplify the processes whereby you can indicate your wishes to your government. Provision will be made for plebiscites at public request on regional or provincial issues such as Daylight Saving Time, commercialized Sunday sports, fluoridation, etc., and your wishes, as indicated by a simple majority vote, will be recognized and implemented.

In the case of producer marketing boards, provision will be made for the voluntary registration of producers eligible to vote and a board will be established if supported by a majority vote of those who register.

Votes on money bylaws are in a different category in that such decisions once made cannot be reversed after the money has been borrowed and spent. We propose that the 66 $\frac{2}{3}$ % favorable vote now required should apply only if less than 50% of those eligible vote. If more than 50% vote, such bylaws would be approved by a simple majority.

On this same subject of strengthening the rights and responsibilities of individual citizens, we propose three other steps:

- (1) We are reviewing provincial statutes and regulations with a view to eliminating unnecessary restrictions which interfere with the autonomous operation of local elected authorities or which, unnecessarily, circumscribe individual freedom of choice.
- (2) If the present committee now examining in to the operation of government boards and tribunals finds that there is need for some form of special review court or ombudsman to safeguard the rights of individual citizens,

the government will take the necessary steps to implement such recommendations.

- (3) A Declaration of Human Rights Bill will be submitted to the next session to embody in law a declaration of those human rights to which we all subscribe.

The next and much bigger problem we have tackled is that of developing a program that will more adequately meet the increasing financial needs of municipalities and school boards. To this end we will recommend to the next session a four-point program under which an additional fifty million dollars a year will be allocated from provincial revenue sources.

- (1) To reduce the amount of money municipal authorities must raise by local taxation.
- (2) To provide municipalities with an assured source of revenue other than the present property tax.
- (3) To give a measure of relief to those most seriously affected by present tax levies on real property, and
- (4) To aid municipalities in meeting the capital costs involved in providing freeways, bridges and roads to handle modern highway traffic demands.

Under this program an additional twenty million dollars will be allocated to the education foundation fund. This will meet the anticipated increases in school capital and operational costs during the coming year and make possible a substantial reduction in present supplementary requisitions.

We further propose to allocate to municipalities, with no strings attached, one-third of the total revenue accruing annually to the province from royalties obtained from the development of our oil and gas resources.

This alternative to the present municipal grants program will increase municipal revenues the first year by some four million dollars and the revenue from this source will increase annually as more oil and gas is marketed.

We propose, further, that the province will pay 75% of the construction costs of approved freeways, including bridges; 50% of the construction costs of approved expressways and main arterial roads; and 100% of the costs of highways through fringe areas within a city.

Road grants to L.I.D.'s, Special Areas, counties and municipalities, will be increased pending completion of engineering studies and inventories leading to a program which will ensure a province-wide grid system of secondary roads serving towns and villages as well as rural municipalities.

A million dollars a year for five years will be allocated for the construction and improvement of roads linking highways with provincial parks.

To ease the burden of municipal taxation for the group of taxpayers most seriously affected, we will recommend to the next session that homeowners occupying their own homes, either urban or rural, will be entitled to a tax discount in the amount of \$50.00.

This discount, which the homeowner will be authorized to claim when he pays his tax bill, will be made up to the municipalities by the prov-

incial treasury. This proposal is in no sense a handout or a repayment to people of their own tax dollars. The principle of discounts is not new. In this case the discount is for a legitimate twofold purpose. First, to give a measure of relief to a category of taxpayers who need it most without depleting tax revenues from commercial and industrial property which is what happens when there is an across-the-board reduction in property taxes. Second, it will establish a desirable differential in the impact of local taxation as between homeowners and commercial and industrial property.

The third section of our program deals with agriculture. It will include a new imaginative livestock program with emphasis on steps to improve quality and grade and embodying livestock and livestock diseases research. A livestock dealers' insurance fund will be established to protect producers up to 80% of the market value of livestock sold through registered dealers in case of bankruptcy or default. The fund will be financed by a levy of a few cents per head on livestock sold through registered dealers. The government will advance the money to establish this fund and recoup it over an extended period. This advance will be sufficient to reimburse those farmers who suffered serious losses through the Veregin bankruptcy case. This insurance fund will reduce the bond requirements imposed on livestock dealers and will provide much better protection to our farmers than is provided by the bonds presently required.

A long-range soil and water conservation program will be implemented, including the development of stock-watering projects. Detailed plans are being prepared for stage development of the Red Deer River diversion scheme.

Next, we propose an important revision of the Alberta voluntary medical insurance plan to more completely bring the benefits of comprehensive medical services within the financial reach of all Alberta residents. A new third category of participants eligible for subsidy will be brought into the plan comprised of citizens whose taxable income is between \$500 and \$1,000.

For those with no taxable income, the present subsidy will be increased from 50% to 80% of the cost of their medical insurance.

For those whose taxable income is under \$500, the subsidy will be increased from the present 25% to 50%, and

For those whose taxable income is from \$500 to \$1,000, the subsidy will be 25% of the insurance premium.

The government-imposed ceilings on all premiums will be retained. Additional policies will be offered under the plan to include prescription drugs and other paramedical services. Policies, including these additional services, will be at higher premium rates than the regular coverage but the government subsidies will apply to all policies if the purchaser is eligible. This will provide our people with a wide range of choice in the matter of medical services coverage most suitable to their particular needs.

We are investigating the possibility of establishing a self-insurance fund to protect all citizens against catastrophic financial liabilities where, through exceptional circumstances, excessive medical or hospital costs are incurred.

The last major feature I have time to deal with tonight is something of special interest to all young people. Over 700,000 of Alberta's people are under 25 years of age. Recognizing that the standards and strength of society depends on the extent to which our youth develop their vast constructive potentials, we propose to establish at the next session a special Ministry of Youth. The purpose of this Ministry will be to encourage constructive youth activities and organizations — to stimulate interest in youth training for leadership in social, cultural, business and public affairs — to develop a constructive sports and physical fitness program — to provide assistance to those who prove they have the potential to compete in provincial, national or international championship meets and, in general, to give leadership in all forms of constructive sports and recreation and in the profitable use of leisure time.

There are many other important new features in our program which I will tell you about on future telecasts but I hope what I have said tonight will give you some idea that we are on the threshold of new and great things in this province. Already Alberta is the leading province in Canada but what we confidently expect to achieve in the future will far surpass what we have known in the past.

I hope you have caught some of the enthusiasm that permeates these new and far-reaching ideas. If so, let us go forward together to the great future that is ours beyond these new and broadened horizons, grateful that we live in a province with such vast potentials and such limitless opportunities.

Thank you and good-night.