

Good afternoon, Ladies and gentlemen – Rotarians.

There is a Chinese curse that says “May you live in interesting times.” Whether it is a curse or a blessing, we certainly are living in interesting times in Calgary, and in Alberta. These are exciting times - unprecedented times. And the political decisions made today will have an enormous influence on our future.

Last fall, we went directly to citizens to talk about the financial sustainability for our city. I laid out a plan for the Province to vacate their portion of the property tax, leave it with the City to be invested into infrastructure.

Over a thousand Calgarians came out to these town halls, and I’d personally thank each and every one of them. They made a huge difference.

At every Town Hall, I said that municipal sustainability is like a road map. If you didn’t like the route I was proposing, that’s fine, provided the Province was willing to chart their own route to sustainability.

I’m pleased to report that our new Premier, did just that during the campaign for the leadership. Premier Stelmach said that he would give the equivalent of property tax, 1.4 Billion dollars, back to all of Alberta’s municipalities every year for 10 years. This is a new and unconditional grant to be ramped up to 1.4 Billion annually over the first three years.

That commitment will stand as one of the most significant political promises ever made to Albertans. Following through on that commitment will be a true milestone, a turning point, for Alberta.

It signals that the Provincial government recognizes that for our Province to be successful, municipalities must be successful. It indicates that our Province is putting an end to the absurdity of forcing cities to provide a growing list of essential services and infrastructure without providing them with the financial tools to actually deliver.

When Premier Stelmach makes good on his promise this spring, high growth communities like ours will finally start to have the resources we need to ensure our community works!

Make no mistake, having cities and communities that work is absolutely essential to the future prosperity of all Albertans.

This city and this province are competing in a global arena. It's a field of competition where success will be found by those who are best able to attract skilled workers, business and capital for investment.

Just last week, we had four Atlantic Premiers in Alberta asking people to return home. The Saskatchewan government is doing the same thing. Without a doubt, we are not only competing for investment dollars and business, we are vying for the skilled people to do the work.

Here's a staggering statistic about Alberta. As of the end of 2006, there were over 158 Billion dollars worth of major construction projects either recently completed, currently underway or proposed to start within the next few years.

158 Billion. It's almost too massive to comprehend. Here's some perspective. There are only three places in the world today seeing that kind of investment potential. Shanghai, Dubai and Alberta.

This is truly a pivotal moment. Growth and investment of that magnitude can achieve one of two outcomes. It will either be accommodated, feed itself and ensure future prosperity. Or if that growth isn't accommodated, it will collapse under itself.

When it comes to accommodating growth, municipalities are the front lines. Every think-tank in Canada - The Canada West Foundation, The Conference Board of Canada, The TD Bank, The C.D. Howe Institute - They all have said our future economic performance will depend on the sustainability of our cities and communities.

Calgary needs to be an affordable, safe and exciting city, that's easy to get around in. It needs to be a place where people want to live, and a place where business and investment wants to be.

That means delivering services and infrastructure: Transit, roads, police, fire and EMS stations, water treatment facilities, recreation centres and parks, and arts facilities. And most importantly, a sustainable city needs the financial resources to deliver.

Our province is taking its place as a significant player on the world stage, and Calgary plays a central role in that performance. Six out of every ten jobs created in Alberta last year, were created in Calgary. In fact, Calgary accounted for one out of every five jobs created in Canada last year.

2006 was a landmark year in our City's history. Our population grew by a record 36,000 people - that's 97 people a day.

On July 25th, we welcomed the birth of our one millionth Calgarian. In just over a century, we went from a little town to a metropolis of a million people. That's incredible. Just think, it took 1800 years for the cities of London and Paris to reach that milestone.

In 2006, we smashed the previous record for construction values. Last year those values were more than a billion dollars higher than The City of Toronto, and double that of Edmonton.

If a city had a gas pedal, ours was on the floor in 2006.

Calgary is becoming a world city, and that's something that we, as Calgarians, sometimes lose sight of. They say that when change happens slowly, you don't even notice it. To some extent, the same can be true when your environment is changing quickly.

Calgarians have become accustomed to the pace of growth in our city. We see cranes and construction, and they now form a regular part of our landscape. And when things change quickly, it's sometimes human nature to focus on the downside, the curse, of the interesting times that we live in.

Our growth is causing some strain. The roads, the busses, the trains are fuller than ever. The cost of housing has soared. It's harder and harder to find staff.

Yes, growth brings some challenges. But rather than asking ourselves whether our glass is half empty or half full, we should be asking the question, what do you do when your glass is running over?

The answer's pretty simple. Get a bigger glass or get a mop.

As a municipality we're prepared for growth. And that re-investment must begin today.

What does it look like? It means building the west leg of our light rail transit system. It means more busses, LRT cars, and interchanges. It means 3 new major recreation centres, and fire, police and EMS stations. It means a major re-investment in the downtown, and support for arts and cultural facilities.

The plans are ready and waiting. All we need now are the resources to fully implement them. And the Premier's commitment will help us achieve that.

It will help us build on the work that Calgary has already been doing.

Since becoming Mayor in 2001, we've invested nearly 2 Billion dollars into transportation infrastructure, with over half a Billion this year alone. We've built new interchanges and road improvements. We've extended the LRT in the south. Two more are underway in the north, and will be completed within the year.

Transit riders will be pleased to know, 40 new LRT cars have begun arriving. We'll be getting 2 to 3 cars a month, until we've increased capacity on our LRT by 30% over the next two years. We have 100 new busses and shuttles arriving this year, and we've added an additional 30,000 Transit hours to this year's budget.

Transportation is a priority for Calgarians, and City Council is determined to deliver on that priority.

Calgarians value a safe community. That is our number one job as municipal government. Over the past 4 years alone, we've dedicated 125 million dollars towards protective services capital. More police, fire and EMS stations, more vehicles and equipment, along with increased staff.

Our budget this year will see 80 additional fire fighters, 60 police officers and 75 EMS personnel. We've added more Transit cops to protect people on our LRT system. We've provided funding for 36 new additional Police Officers for the downtown and beltline alone, and that's on top of the funding for growth in the Police Service overall.

Why the downtown? - Because a safe and clean downtown is important to every Calgarian, regardless of where they live. There are 32,000 Calgarians who live in the downtown and beltline, and 120,000 work in the downtown everyday, and the number is growing. Based upon Calgary's growth, we are projecting that in the next 25 years we will need 125 new residential and commercial towers in the downtown and beltline - towers of at least 30 stories or more.

That is an absolutely staggering number.

The downtown is the heart of Calgary, and in recent years it has gotten a little rough around the edges. Last year we launched a program called Clean to the Core. It involves all of our city services - protective services, roads, parks - every department. We've dedicated a downtown team. They are responsible for cleaning up the big problems, and caring about the little things so they don't become problems.

Our team has been in place for a few months, and we're starting to see results. We see more Police and Transit Security on the ground. We're cleaning up the streets, the alleys and the graffiti. We want Calgarians to be proud of their downtown, and tourists to be envious!

Part of that solution involves redevelopment of the downtown east of Centre Street, known as The Rivers District. Within the next year, work will begin to redevelop this area. There has been tremendous activity under the surface on the Rivers. Our planning is complete, and this spring the infrastructure report will be coming forward to City Council for approval.

This area includes EnCana's new headquarters which is scheduled to break ground this year. We've set aside land for a new post-secondary campus in the Rivers. It will connect to redevelopment across the tracks in Stampede Park and Victoria Park.

After many decades, this blighted area of our city will finally begin reaching its full potential.

Another part of the solution for cleaning up the downtown is dealing with the social problems, and in particular, our growing challenge of homelessness.

Recently, the Calgary Committee to End Homelessness was established. This is a community-led initiative, and it's being chaired by Steve Snyder from TransAlta. It brings together senior business leaders, social agencies, the faith community, and all three orders of government. The mission of this group is to draft a plan to end homelessness in our community within 10 years.

Mr. Snyder and the volunteers on his committee deserve our thanks and support. I'd like to personally thank them for their commitment, and recognize and thank Alderman Farrell and King for service on the committee.

This initiative offers great hope that we can stop managing homelessness, and implement a long-term strategy to end it.

Ladies and gentlemen, I encourage each of you to reflect on what is taking place in our city today. We do live in very interesting and exciting times, but most will agree, that is no curse.

It is true that success brings with it challenges, but Calgarians are known for rolling up their sleeves and solving problems. And now it appears the Province will be rolling up its sleeves to work along with us.

They say that the world can be divided into two different groups. There are those who see things as they are, and ask why? While others see things as they could be, and ask why not?

It is safe to say that most Calgarians fall into the second group. This is a city of dreamers and hard workers.

Calgary did not rise to a city of a million people through good fortune nor good intentions. Our prosperity is the product of creative and determined minds and bodies. Calgary's drive and imagination will ensure our prosperity for generations.

And it will guarantee that our city is known throughout the globe as a great place to do business, and an even better place to live.

Thank you and good afternoon.