

## **Economic boom creates challenges for province**

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In the midst of an economic boom in the province, what is being done to ensure that corresponding challenges are being met for the future of Alberta? Liberal MLA in Calgary Mountainview and former Palliser Health Region medical officer of health, David Swann spoke at the annual general meeting of the Medicine Hat Alberta Liberal Constituency Association Thursday night.

This is a time of tremendous opportunity as well as tremendous danger for the province, according to Swann. Unparalleled growth in both population and development pose challenges to social stability and environmental protection.

“Climate change has altered everything we think about the future, particularly our use of energy,” said Swann. “And more than ever we need the public to be engaged in defining what this province will look like in the next 50 years.”

Scientific data is needed to indicate when we’re reaching the limits of our eco-system, said Swann, adding that as a province, “we are up against a wall.”

He feels that Medicine Hat will be among the first areas to experience the severe impacts of climate change and the energy crunch, as the city is reaching the end of its own natural gas resources.

“We cannot procrastinate any longer. We desperately need a land-use plan for this province that sets the priority on water conservation. How are we going to manage our economy and our limited environmental resources into the future?”

Both the pace and type of developments should be determined very carefully, always considering the environmental impact. Swann feels that based on current trends, a strong focus will be placed on alternative forms of energy such as solar, wind, geothermal and hydrogen.

“There’s a tremendous market now opening up and the question is, are we going to be lagging behind and buying some of the new energy technology from other countries or are we actually going to lead the pack and move towards these new energy directions and therefore be more competitive in the world?”

In Swann’s opinion, the next election will see the Liberal party favoured by more Albertans. The latest budget under Premier Ed Stelmach’s government is a reflection of a lack of planning during the past decade, he said.

Social services such as infrastructure, affordable housing, education, health care and environmentally friendly public transportation need to be addressed properly.

“It’s a reminder that we are still living off our non-renewable energy. It’s not going to be there in the future in the same way,” Swann said. “It was a very sobering budget for me to realize that we are still not putting away substantial amounts of money for future generations and living off the interest instead of living off the capital. I think Albertans are ready for a change.”

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