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Alberta losing \$7 million each and every day

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The size and meaning of the number are mind boggling. Seven million taxpayers dollars every day.

It's a number I struggled to get my mind around, and I suspect many Albertans will have to do the same, but do it they should.

Seven million taxpayers dollars every day is the conservative estimate of what Ed Stelmach and this Conservative government hand over to the oil and gas industry as a royalty freebie. Seven million dollars yesterday, seven million tomorrow, seven million every day last week, last month and last year.

Keep in mind that this is an entry-level basement estimate of what our fair share of royalty earnings should be. There is no reason, other than a ferocious industry distortion campaign and Conservative government failure, that a fair share for the citizens of Alberta should not be more than \$4 billion a year. It could easily be double that, but let's work with the \$4 billion the royalty review panel said was a minimum.

To put this number in context, Albertans have to think back over the past 10 years, think about what's happening today, and think about what's likely to happen in the years to come. They have to ask what has happened to them, their family and their friends, their health care, education, social services, environmental protection, land, water and air quality, public facilities and services, and the social order all around them.

We have to imagine where we would be with \$7 million each day available for all the major and minor problems and failures we see, read about and hear about each day.

Five million dollars to repair leaky school, library or hospital roofs? About five hours of handouts to the oil and gas industry. Families forced to pay \$300 to \$400 a year for school supplies? Thank the Conservatives for their generous handouts to the oil and gas industry.

A looming university tuition fee increase of five per cent, when in fact tuition for Alberta residents should be capped well below what it now is? Thank the royalty holiday of \$7 million a day.

Waiting times ranging from six months to three years for some medical services? Not enough hospital rooms, ambulances, nurses or doctors? Think about \$7 million a day pumped into the system for a month.

Law enforcement that is slowly losing ground to street gangs, drive-by shootings and rampant drug dealing? Point your finger at the royalty giveaway.

Not enough conservation officers to control poaching and contain off-road vehicle vandals? Seven million dollars a day stuffed back in the oil and gas industry's pocket is the difference. Withering libraries desperate for staff and books? You bet \$7 million a day would make a difference. And on and on it goes.

There isn't an Albertan who hasn't been burned by this royalty fiasco almost every week of his or her life, and it's been going on for years.

Let's quickly look at all the other advantages and benefits of collecting our minimum fair share of royalties. And always remember, this is a definite minimum. In a biological system where survival of the fittest is at play, the physical and genetically disadvantaged don't survive.

In Alberta's oilpatch, dozens if not a hundred minor companies have soaked up part of the \$7 million a day to carry on a welfare existence. They'd be gone if we had a competitive free enterprise system, but instead of funding public medical, social and educational services,

Stelmach and the Conservatives keep these hangers-on alive with our money.

These and larger oil and gas entities use our \$7 million a day to pay lopsided wages that soak up the labour pool, forcing every other enterprise to scramble, and forcing the taxpayer to further subsidize the labour pool with foreign recruitment and tax and regulatory giveaways.

Every time some oil and gas company offers free housing and meals to a Filipino or Somalian or Mexican or American labourer or tradesperson, realize that there goes your \$7 million. Want to know who's paying for the mega-mansions that are miniature versions of Banff hotels, or who's paying for the second and third McMansions in Arizona or on the Sunshine Coast? There goes your \$7 million a day.

We cannot weigh the significance of this without looking at one of the ugliest costs imposed on Albertans, and sadly, on Canada and the world.

The \$7-million-a-day non-collection royalty caper is fuelling global warming at a rate that puts the oil and gas industry and Alberta's Conservative government at the head of the parade of destruction.

It's hard to believe these people are actually proud of this when people around the world are paying dearly for industry and government greed. We haven't gotten our fair share for 20 years, although many Albertans knew that and have worked hard to try to force this government to be honest and fair.

The Fair Share report created a crack in the government/industry secrecy and misinformation barrier behind which Albertans have been bilked out of billions of dollars. We now have an opportunity to take back some control of our lives, our land and our government.

We can break the stranglehold the oil and gas industry has on our money and resources.

The royalty review report passed the torch to Albertans. You have the choice, today and in the next election, to hold it high and march forward. An honest and fair Alberta awaits us.

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