

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much. Thank you for being here, and thank you to your officials for joining us.

I am going to start with the Springbank off-stream reservoir, SR1.

I see that there is funding in the budget, and you talked earlier today about the fact that this project continues to be a priority for your ministry, and I'm very glad to hear that. But I want to report to you on behalf of my constituents and also folks I've talked with in the broader business community in downtown Calgary and also people downstream who will very much take an interest in the pace at which this project is moving ahead. There's a lot of frustration about the fact that this is now going on five years from one of the largest natural disasters in our province's history. Every spring people cast their eyes to the mountains and see the snowpack, this year in particular, and they are concerned about the risk of flooding every year. The project does remain on the books, but can you just confirm for us in as simple terms as possible: what's the timeline? When is this project going to be complete?

Mr. Mason: Well, as I mentioned earlier in answer to Grande Prairie-Wapiti, I've asked the department to conduct a detailed analysis of the timelines to ensure that our timelines are current and accurate and take into account all of the potential factors that may lead to delay. I should say that, you know, ultimately, given the level of opposition from the landowners and from the Tsuut'ina, court challenges are likely, which are beyond our control and could potentially add to the timelines in terms of getting the project under way. That being said, I want the latest information in terms of what all of the potential risks are, and I want to be able to share that publicly.

Mr. Clark: Do you have a timeline as to when we're going to see that analysis?

Mr. Mason: I think within a couple of – well, I hate to say for sure, because it has to be something that I'm satisfied has covered the waterfront, if you know what I mean, but it should be months.

Mr. Clark: So you remain committed to this project. I mean, earlier on you compared it to McLean Creek in particular, the McLean Creek project being further upstream and therefore less effective with more of an impact in a provincial park and other more sensitive environmental areas and, as a result of both of those things and just the design of it, also more expensive. I was pleased to see my colleague from the UCP agreeing with that perspective as well. I guess I would just like to dive in, then, to where we are in the regulatory approval process. I understand that recently your ministry filed an updated environmental impact assessment in response to the questions that CEAA had asked. Are you confident that this filing is accurate? Do we expect more information requests back from CEAA?

Mr. Mason: I'm hoping that if there are any, they're relatively minor in nature. We've comprehensively reviewed the comments that CEAA made with respect to the first filing. We've added a very well-respected environmental consulting company, Golder Associates, to oversee the work of Stantec in terms of the preparation and filing of the recent resubmission, which has now occurred. We've done a number of things on the government side to ensure that the management and oversight of this project are first rate. We've established a deputy ministers' committee to provide

additional oversight from across ministries.

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I've mentioned Golder Associates. We've established an expert technical team that will be positioned to rapidly respond to any further requests for information that CEAA might have, and we're prepared to prequalify contractors to ensure that the project can be tendered immediately following regulatory approval. We are actively considering other alternatives that would increase the assurance that the project will be approved. Also, we're looking for ways to find improvements on the timeline to make sure that it proceeds as quickly as possible.

Mr. Clark: Okay. It sounds encouraging, so I'll just go down that path. You say that it's a DMs committee. I assume that that means it's deputy ministers. Mr. Day, I assume, is part of that committee.

Mr. Mason: Yeah. Absolutely.

Mr. Clark: Are they deputy ministers from a variety of departments?

Mr. Mason: Yes. I think Environment and Parks, Justice, and Treasury Board are all represented on that committee.

Mr. Clark: Okay. Well, that's encouraging. Can you speak at all about – and I recognize some of this may be either in development or just sensitive or something you perhaps can't share. To the degree you can, I'd like to know more about some of the specific actions you feel you can take to compress the timeline.

Mr. Mason: Well, you know, I'm waiting to get recommendations with that. Normally you will require regulatory approval before proceeding with expropriation, which is one of the things, so if there are alternatives to that, that's something that we would be prepared to consider. Obviously, I've asked the Justice department for a detailed analysis of the potential legal risks that we might run from opponents to the project as well.

Mr. Clark: That's fair. You know, one thing I want to state as clearly as I can is that I'm very sensitive to the concerns of landowners in the Springbank area that will be directly impacted. I sincerely wish that there was another way that we could move forward with this particular project or a project that is as effective, timely, cost-effective. But, unfortunately, when the broader public interest is at stake, that sometimes means that the government needs to acquire private property either through negotiation or at times through expropriation, and that process needs to be fair and in accordance with the law. Certainly, everything I've seen so far tells me that this project absolutely meets the public interest because it addresses the economic well-being of probably a million Calgarians and perhaps beyond, including residents both within Calgary and downstream. Unfortunately, that means that sometimes the government needs to acquire some private property.

You've somewhat answered my question, but it sounds like you are considering options around expropriation that would not perhaps mean we need to wait for the regulatory process.

Mr. Mason: I don't really feel comfortable commenting on that because I haven't received the advice yet.

Mr. Clark: Okay. That's fair.

Mr. Mason: I should say that I met with, of course, certainly, the mayor quite a while ago, I've met with the Tsuut'ina on this matter, but I've also met with the Calgary Chamber of commerce, Calgary Economic Development, the Stampede, all of whom are vitally interested in this. This is not just affecting a handful of wealthy homeowners, which I think is how it's been kind of prepared, as wealthy landowners. It actually has an impact on the entire city of Calgary and the downtown of Calgary, which is the economic . . .

Mr. Clark: Engine of southern Alberta.

Mr. Mason: Engine? I don't want to disparage our oil sands.

Mr. Clark: They work hand in hand.

Mr. Mason: You know what I'm saying. That's where the financial and business decisions are made for the province, and much of that area of downtown Calgary is on a flood plain and is at risk, billions and billions of dollars' worth of investment that is there, and the impact that it could have on the Alberta economy is critical. I've been working to try and mobilize the business community, particularly in Calgary, around this so that it's not just, you know, the good people of Elbow Park that are fighting to get this project built. We need to work to build broad support across the city of Calgary for this project to go ahead.

Mr. Clark: Yeah. Are you finding that support from Calgary's business community?

Mr. Mason: Absolutely.

Mr. Clark: Good. In terms of acquiring the parcels of land that are required, my recollection from our previous discussions is that there were three parcels of land that were acquired previously.

Mr. Mason: Three quarter sections.

Mr. Clark: Three quarter sections. Is that still the current status of land that's been acquired, or have you acquired more land?

Mr. Mason: I don't think there's any new.

Mr. Clark: All right. In the filing submitted to CEAA, the most recent documents that I was able to download, the project timeline that's part of that figure 317 in those documents has environmental assessments and engineering through calendar 2017 – of course, it's now into the second quarter of 2018 – and then land acquisition running from the first quarter of 2017 through the first quarter of 2019, with the regulatory process running through calendar 2018. Can you comment at all on whether you feel – ultimately, this timeline has us functionally operational in the first quarter of 2021. What matters, of course, is whether there's protection in the springtime. There'd be some functionality to a 1 in 100 flood level

by the spring of 2021 and a fully final completion, able to accommodate water volumes equal to the 2013 flood, by the first quarter of 2022. Is that still our timeline?

Mr. Mason: Well, as I said, hon. member, I've requested the department evaluate those timelines to make sure that they're still current and still valid, and when I have that information, I'm going to make it available.

Mr. Clark: Okay. I look forward to seeing that as soon as possible, and I know everyone else does. I have to say that I am concerned about the timeline.

We haven't talked much about the provincial regulatory process. There's a federal process through CEAA and then the provincial process through the National Resources Conservation Board, or NRCB. I understand that they have also asked for a supplementary information request and sent your department a letter, I believe, on the 21st of February. Can you comment on where you are in terms of responding to this provincial information request and what impact that may have on the timeline?

Mr. Mason: There are ongoing discussions with the NRCB in terms of the information that they've asked for through Alberta Environment. There has not been a formal response to their letter, but there has been discussion. We're waiting for our colleagues in Environment and Parks with respect to direction there, and that has all been included in the updated environmental assessment as well. Mr.

Clark: So the information requested from NRCB was included in the updated environmental assessment that was submitted to CEAA? Is that correct?

Mr. Mason: Yes.

Mr. Clark: Okay. Is there more information, then, to be submitted to the NRCB before – I guess what I'm asking, really, is: what is the trigger point at which we can expect to see public regulatory hearings on this project?

Mr. Mason: My deputy will respond to that.

Mr. Day: We've submitted the revised environmental impact assessment report to both CEAA and to Alberta Environment and Parks, who reviews the report and the material on behalf of the NRCB. Both Environment and Parks and CEAA have committed to doing those reviews within one month following the time of submission, so by the end of April we should have back any comments from both agencies on the resubmitted environmental impact assessment.

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Mr. Clark: Then, from there, I guess I'm curious where things stand in terms of CEAA. They've got their 365-day clock that they must do the review within. I know that clock is not ticking now because they've requested supplementary information, but once they've accepted the revised filings, does that clock start ticking?

Mr. Mason: Well, there's the one-month period that they take to examine the material for its completeness and so on, and then

provided that that's satisfactory, this clock starts again. There are 315 days to go.

Mr. Clark: Three hundred and fifteen?

Mr. Mason: Yeah.

Mr. Clark: Okay. Good.

Mr. Mason: But, you know, it's a bit like the clock at the end of a hockey game.

Mr. Clark: It doesn't go as quickly as you might like, depending on the score?

Mr. Mason: It stops from time to time.

Mr. Clark: I'm glad you spelled that out for me. Thank you. In terms of anticipated costs, then, just again to clarify, there's \$130 million in the budget this year, and that is for land acquisition exclusively, or are there other things that . . .

Mr. Mason: There are some engineering costs as well. The total project cost is \$432 million. Of that, construction and engineering is \$292 million, and land purchases is \$140 million. Now, we've offered, at the landowners' request, to buy entire parcels of land. Some of the land that we need only takes up a small fraction of a quarter section, and they were crying foul about that, so we offered, then, to sweeten the offer and buy all parcels of land. The imprint of the project itself requires 3,600 acres, but entire parcels take that up to 6,800. If that was accepted by the landowners, we would hope to recoup \$60 million of that from selling remnant parcels. However, we haven't seen any movement on an agreement to purchase on that basis. If we go to expropriation, we only expropriate the land that we actually need for the project, so that additional funding for entire parcels would no longer be on the table. That's up to the landowners to decide.

Mr. Clark: Okay. Is there a timeline on that decision?

Mr. Mason: On what decision?

Mr. Clark: Have you sort of said that it's an offer that's on the table until a certain point in time?

Mr. Mason: Well, to the point where we have to begin expropriation, then it's not on the table anymore.

Mr. Clark: Okay. Good. Thank you.

The relations with Tsuut'ina Nation are obviously very important in ensuring that they have been properly and fully consulted and allowed input into this project. You alluded earlier to some of that consultation. Can you give us an update on what specifically you're doing to ensure that the Tsuut'ina Nation is being fully and properly consulted as part of this project?

Mr. Mason: Well, there was extensive consultation with the

Tsuut'ina over the course of this project, and we've had some open houses and so on subsequently. They have indicated that they oppose the project. They've indicated that they are working on some alternatives for flood mitigation that might take place on their existing land. We have not seen that, and we're not sure where that's at. But we've funded a study for them to look at their traditional land use. They've walked the land on several occasions looking for artifacts, looking for traditional sites and so on. We've funded that, and I think that's been submitted to CEAA.

(...)

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I just want to pick up a couple of wrap-up questions on the Springbank SR1 project. You talked earlier about the deputy minister's committee: Environment and Parks, Justice, Treasury Board, Finance as well as yourselves in Transportation. I'm curious if those conversations are limited only to the Springbank project itself or if you're having broader discussions about things like flood mapping work.

Mr. Mason: Yeah. It's just Springbank at this point.

Mr. Clark: It's just Springbank.

Mr. Mason: Yeah. We're very targeted on, you know, that. There's obviously a lot more that needs to be done in terms of flood mitigation in a number of communities and Calgary as well. There are a number of projects – and these are in Environment and Parks' budget, not in mine – of flood mitigation on the Bow River, which is potentially even a greater threat than the Elbow River is. Those are being addressed by that department.

Mr. Clark: Good. I look forward to asking your colleagues in Environment and Parks about that next week.

(...)

Mr. Clark: Okay. That's good. I want to turn now to the southwest ring road. I've heard from several of my constituents and others who have a great deal of concern about the bridge span over the Elbow River. They're quite interested in seeing that be a single span as opposed to the design that exists today. Can you comment on that and whether you would consider their requests for that single-span bridge, and if not, what the rationale is for proceeding as you have planned?

Mr. Mason: Well, if we went for a single-span bridge, it would seriously put in jeopardy the path to balance because, you know, that's a really, really expensive thing. We've widened the passage so that there are wildlife corridors that are provided for now. It's more than enough to handle the water flow of a 2013-level flood on the Elbow River.

We've taken new steps to mitigate any loss of wetlands according to the latest standards, which we didn't have to do, the 2013 standards. So it does comply with all federal and provincial legislation, and we've had it reviewed and accepted by third-party consultants retained by the city of Calgary. I think that's what we can afford to do. It meets all the needs. I know that there are people in that community and people that are environmentally concerned that would like a single span that would not disrupt things, but that's not the plan. As I mentioned earlier, we are constrained by timelines that we've been locked into, so a complete redesign is not only expensive but jeopardizes the time frame.

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Mr. Clark: So you're comfortable that the bridge that you're designing and will build would not be at risk of failure if in a 2013 level flood?

Mr. Mason: That's specifically been looked at by engineers and, I think, also by the outside consultant of the city of Calgary. Am I correct about that? Yeah. Best advice. You know, best advice.

Mr. Clark: Are you confident that the design does not further exacerbate the flood risk downstream in Calgary?

Mr. Mason: Well, downstream is less of a concern than upstream, but my understanding is that the upstream is satisfactory to a 2013 level flood.

Mr. Clark: Thank you.