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The State of the Alberta Film and Television Industry

The Calgary Herald's editorial of July 15, 2009 focused attention on an issue of vital importance to more than three thousand Albertans who work in Alberta's film, television and digital media production industry – namely the question of how the province should support its film and television industry.

This industry, once a rapidly growing leader in the country, is grappling with an immediate and growing crisis. Production levels in Alberta have dropped precipitously, with activity now hovering around thirty percent compared to the first six months of 2008.

This means Alberta is losing skilled professionals; people who were trained by this province's education system, and who have built their world class reputations on fabulous Alberta productions such as *Heartland*, *Brokeback Mountain*, and *Passchendaele*. These writers, directors, performers, camera technicians, designers, electricians and carpenters are all highly trained and well paid professionals who share a passion and dedication to a creative industry that is recognized around the world as a valuable part of any growing economy. They are now being forced to seek employment in other provinces where incentives have led to increased production, which in turn nurtures local infrastructure, tourism, educational institutes and numerous ancillary businesses.

States and provinces across North America and around the world invest aggressively in the film and television industry to stimulate the economy and create jobs in their jurisdictions. These governments understand that each dollar invested can provide as much as a ten-fold return. Most recently, Ontario and Quebec enhanced their respective film and television programs, using a model first introduced by Alberta over a decade ago to take the lead in attracting indigenous and foreign production and investment.

Cast and crew members are not the only people impacted by the lack of production in Alberta. Numerous related Alberta businesses are in jeopardy. Restaurants, hotels, car rental agencies, equipment suppliers, catering companies, prop shops all see business moving to other provinces. As with any industry infrastructure, these companies have invested a tremendous amount in the film and television industry over the years, an investment that may never be replaced.

The lack of a sound stage and studio facilities, particularly in southern Alberta, is a tremendous deterrent to local and out of province film producers. Competing jurisdictions have purpose-built studio space, with public sector investments such as the recently announced \$263 million from the Province of Ontario in a new digital studio for Toronto. Without a competitive incentive system, it will be difficult to attract private investors to help develop a viable soundstage facility in southern Alberta.

Tourism gets an enormous boost from the film industry, as exemplified by the astonishing growth in visitors to Fort Macleod as a direct result of *Brokeback Mountain*. The Royal Tyrell Museum and Fort Edmonton benefited due to the filming of *The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford*. Numerous rural communities throughout Alberta have seen short and long-term economic stimulus due to film activity.

Industry stakeholders have been working with the Provincial Government for over 15 years to build an effective infrastructure for Alberta's film, television and digital media production industry. We recognize that this is a crucial way to diversify Alberta's economy. In these tough economic times it may seem hard to justify increased incentives for film and television, but dozens of other jurisdictions across North America with far greater economic issues are making investments in their film and television industries as a key part of their economic stimulus packages. We know that similar measures in Alberta will have an immediate positive economic impact with long lasting benefits to Alberta's diversified economy, cultural growth and enhanced quality of life.

We recognize the important steps already taken by our provincial government in support of our industry. Despite those steps, aggressive stimulus measures in other jurisdictions have put Alberta at a distinct and potentially fatal disadvantage, jeopardizing any progress made in the past decade to nurture this valuable sector of our province's economy.

Without immediate and strong stimulus, Alberta will lose the opportunity to be a leader, or even a meaningful participant, in Canada's film, television and digital industries.



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