

Message to Albertans

Alberta's proud history and western traditions have given us a solid foundation that tells us who we are. Now, it's time to define who we want to be.

The immense oil and gas reserves under our feet represent a unique opportunity to build whatever future we choose.

Since 1993, Alberta has received more than \$62 billion in energy revenues. After paying off a \$23 billion debt, we have little to show for the balance.

When I look around my community, I don't see it invested in our schools, our hospitals or our infrastructure. I don't see it being used to diversify our economy or to provide a solid foundation for the day our oil and gas reserves run out.

That's why I believe we must do better.

I want to see an Alberta steeped in opportunity for individuals and for business – a leader both within Canada, and world-wide.

I want to see leaner government that manages money as carefully as ordinary Albertans do. I want to see vibrant communities that are great places to live, and that attract interest and investment from around the world. And I want to see a tidy sum put aside for the future.

Most of all, I want to work *with* Albertans to create an environment where families and businesses can thrive.

Together, let's move Alberta forward by focusing on restoring accountable, responsible leadership in government, and by involving all Albertans in building a truly remarkable future.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kevin Taft". The signature is stylized with a large, sweeping initial "K" and a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Kevin Taft, Leader
Alberta Liberals

Focus. Forward.

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Accountable, Responsible Leadership

The Alberta Liberals believe that openness, transparency and accountability are the benchmarks by which government must be measured.

All Albertans should be confident their interests are truly at the centre of government decisions.

The Alberta Liberals believe government debate belongs in the Legislature instead of behind closed doors, and government business must be open to thorough and independent review.

To move Alberta forward, we will focus on renewing democracy to increase citizen involvement between elections and strengthening government accountability to Albertans.

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The Liberal Plan for Accountable, Responsible Leadership

Democratic Renewal

Set fixed dates for elections every four years.

Establish an independent Citizen's Assembly on Electoral Reform, with its recommendations put to a referendum.

Introduce a *Citizen's Empowerment Act* to give Albertans the power to petition government to either introduce legislation they would like to see, or remove legislation they think is harmful.

Amend election financing laws to restrict individual, corporate or union donations to a maximum of \$5,000 per political party per year.

Greater Accountability

Establish a Lobbyist Registry, to provide voters with a list of individuals, companies and organizations that are working to influence government.

Introduce a one-year "cooling off" period for high-ranking government officials before they can venture into lobbyist positions.

Enact legislation to protect government whistleblowers.

Establish an independent, external body to set MLA remuneration and benefits.

Make government travel and credit card expense accounts public.

Establish an external, independent, non-partisan committee to select the Auditor General and Ethics Commissioner.

Expand the powers of the Auditor General to allow examination of specific cases of government spending, similar to the role of the federal Auditor General.

Strengthen the Public Accounts Committee to allow examination of the mandate, management and operation of all government departments.

Amend the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* to give all Albertans greater access to information regarding public contracts with private suppliers.

Ensure all parties with elected MLAs are represented on legislative committees.

Open up the appointment process for public bodies to ensure that all Albertans are treated fairly and equitably.

Replace the current "government only accounting principles" with Generally Accepted Accounting Principles, to ensure the integrity of government financial records.

Leadership in Public Education

The Alberta Liberals believe that it's time to invest in Alberta's greatest resource – people.

The place to start is in the classroom. From pre-kindergarten to post-secondary, we must aim for excellence in our education system.

Top-notch post-secondary schools and a highly educated workforce will sustain Alberta employers, expand opportunities for young people, raise income levels, attract new businesses and support emerging technologies that can help to diversify our economy. No investment will pay higher dividends.

To move education forward, the Alberta Liberals will focus on:

- strengthening the post-secondary system and increasing accessibility, to give every Albertan the opportunity to reach their potential
- supporting and recognizing excellence in classrooms across Alberta
- expanding Early Childhood Development programs to ensure every child benefits from a healthy and positive start

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The Liberal Plan for Public Education

Post-Secondary Education and Training

Commission an independent study of Alberta's post-secondary education system to identify solutions to financing and accessibility issues and to increase student success.

Commit 35 per cent of annual budget surpluses – uncapped – to establish a Post-Secondary Education Endowment Fund with the mandate to:

- achieve system excellence throughout Alberta
- resolve post-secondary accessibility issues for both rural communities and urban centres
- provide funding and spaces for apprenticeship and training programs across Alberta

Move immediately to increase the number of university spaces.

Provide additional operating dollars to post-secondary institutions to relieve mounting financial pressures.

Immediately freeze post-secondary tuition fees.

Adjust the student loan system to:

- keep pace with inflation, to help students cope with the rising costs of rent, food and transportation
- recognize regional disparities in costs

Children and Schools

Define basic education rights for Alberta children.

Fund and implement the Learning Commission recommendations and timelines for class sizes for kindergarten to grade 12.

Reinforce the status of arts, second languages and physical education as essential complements to the core curriculum.

Adequately fund additional supports for special needs students, gifted students and students whose first language isn't English.

Eliminate the need for school fees and fundraising for education basics.

Support the Community Schools concept, where schools form partnerships with community groups and house a range of services. Recognized for their important role in the community's quality of life, community schools are exempt from closure.

Ensure no forced reductions in the number of school boards.

Plan and budget for the orderly renewal of existing school buildings, equipment and infrastructure, and establish guidelines for developing new schools as needed.

Early Childhood Development

Assist in developing drop-in parenting centres across Alberta, linked to elementary schools, to provide a trusted place for parents to go for support and advice and to ease the transition for children as they enter school.

Introduce optional junior kindergarten and full-day kindergarten programs province-wide, with vulnerable children the priority.

Leadership in Public Health Care

Our public health care system stands among our nation's defining achievements. Changes to the system must be guided by sound research and solid evidence, not driven by ideology.

Evidence clearly shows a well-managed public health care system is more efficient and less expensive than private for-profit health care.

The Alberta Liberals believe a healthy society is about more than good hospitals and fine doctors and nurses; it is also about strong communities, healthy lifestyles and a clean environment.

To move public health care forward, the Alberta Liberals will focus on bold innovation and strong, steady management.

Focus. Forward.

The Liberal Plan for Health Care

A Strong Public Health Care System

Promote the five principles of the *Canada Health Act*: public administration, comprehensiveness, universality, portability and accessibility.

Require all major policies and funding decisions to undergo "Health Impact Assessments" to help the province identify and plan for the potential implications to our health care system.

Establish an independent Health Auditor to ensure that our health care system delivers value for money.

Guarantee fully elected Regional Health Authority boards to give communities a direct say in local health care decisions.

Enact comprehensive conflict of interest legislation to apply to senior management in all of Alberta's Regional Health Authorities.

Alter the fiscal year of Regional Health Authorities so that business plans are approved before the provincial budget is set.

Reduce the role of for-profit delivery in active treatment, diagnostics, lab services, long-term care and home care.

Better Access to Care

Reduce waiting times for medical treatment and surgery by:

- aggressively recruiting and training sufficient numbers of physicians and other health professionals
- actively encouraging the development of specialized surgical centres within the public health care system
- increasing acute care capacity by moving ahead with a new hospital in Calgary and increasing the number of beds in Edmonton and rural Alberta

Pursue aggressive, innovative strategies to reduce emergency room overcrowding and ensure timely access to medical services, such as introducing more Community Health Centres.

Reshape the way we manage our health care workforce: re-examine the roles of all medical professionals, evaluate alternative systems of payment for doctors and gather better data to plan for future needs.

Ensure there are enough residency training positions.

Begin planning now to accommodate the health care needs of an older population.

Include palliative care and midwifery as core health services under the Alberta Health Care Plan.

Restore stable funding and long-term planning to mental health services, including a community-based system of treatment and support.

A Healthier Alberta

Using tobacco tax revenue, establish a Community Wellness Fund to support wellness and lifestyle initiatives and expand Family and Community Support Services (FCSS), to build stronger communities from the grassroots up.

Affordable and Reliable Electricity

Electricity is an essential part of our lives at home, at work and in business. Aside from heat and water, there is no other service as fundamentally tied to our quality of life and economic health.

Before deregulation, Albertans enjoyed some of the lowest electricity rates in the world. Today, our rates are among the highest in Canada.

The Alberta Liberals believe government has a role to play in regulating essential services like electricity, where market forces are insufficient to protect consumers from price instability.

We will move Alberta forward by restoring affordable, stable electricity rates for homeowners and businesses, and return common sense and order to Albertans' monthly power bills.

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The Liberal Plan for Electricity

Re-regulate the electricity system for all Albertans except large industrial users.

Simplify power bills to eliminate customer confusion.

Establish a Planning Council on Electricity to help predict and prepare for future energy requirements using the lowest-cost options.

Keep prices as low as possible by ensuring the lowest-cost power generators are used first.

Actively promote energy conservation, and encourage electricity generation from renewable resources and alternative energy sources.

Fair and Accessible Auto Insurance

Auto insurance rates have risen dramatically in the past two years. The reforms that became effective October 1 provided some relief – particularly for young drivers – but most good drivers will see very little savings from last year's rates, the highest in Alberta's history.

The price of these savings is high – severe limits on compensation for accident victims who sustain broadly-defined "minor" injuries and the loss of their access to the courts.

At the same time, insurance companies are reporting record-breaking profits.

The Alberta Liberals believe auto insurance must be fair and accessible to all legal drivers.

To move Alberta forward, we will focus on developing a public auto insurance system that provides the best deal for Albertans.

Focus. Forward.

The Liberal Plan for Auto Insurance

Develop a public system for auto insurance based on the B.C. model, to end excessive industry profits and reduce the medical, legal and administrative costs of providing insurance.

Restore access to the courts for accident victims, to allow them to seek fair compensation.

Reinvest a portion of auto insurance revenue in road safety programs to reduce injuries and fatalities and to keep rates as low as possible.

Stronger Municipalities

Alberta's cities and towns are key to the province's economic growth. To continue to build Alberta's success, government needs to make sure our municipalities are able to respond to the challenges of growth and renewal.

After a decade of downloading provincial responsibilities onto municipalities, Alberta has accumulated an estimated \$8 billion infrastructure debt province-wide. We must act now to address this growing problem, and develop long-term solutions to prepare Alberta for a strong future.

To move Alberta communities forward, the Alberta Liberals will focus on clearly defining the role of municipalities, restoring stable, equitable funding and working in partnership to address infrastructure challenges.

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The Liberal Plan for Municipalities

Increase local autonomy and create new tax room for municipalities.

Through negotiation between the province and municipalities, develop a three-year rolling grant funding framework, to allow municipalities to plan their infrastructure and other financing needs in advance.

Support Alberta municipalities in resolving the current infrastructure crisis by:

- providing \$3 billion to municipalities over five years to immediately address deferred maintenance and capital spending
- establishing an Alberta Municipal Infrastructure Council to focus and drive the commitment to eliminate municipal infrastructure debt
- working in partnership with municipal governments to guide and implement the federal government's involvement in municipal infrastructure funding

Involve municipalities in redesigning the *Municipal Government Act* to facilitate full participation in the provincial budgeting process and ensure stable and equitable funding.

Leadership in Environment

Albertans are blessed with an abundance of clean air and water, of unsurpassed natural beauty and of biodiversity.

We have a responsibility to manage our legacy responsibly for the enjoyment of generations to come.

Caring for the environment is also vital to our health, our quality of life and our economic prosperity. There is a growing demand for cleaner energy sources, and Alberta is ideally suited to explore development in this area.

To move Alberta forward, the Alberta Liberals will focus on implementing real environmental protection and setting Alberta on course to become a world leader in developing new energy technologies.

Focus. Forward.

The Liberal Plan for the Environment

Climate Change

Fight for reasonable timelines to implement federal emission targets while protecting the economic vitality of our energy sector.

Support aggressive research into renewable energy sources (wind, biomass, solar) and cleaner use of non-renewable resources.

Support the growth of environmental technology companies.

Encourage and support urban design and public transit strategies that minimize environmental impacts.

Create a revolving fund for energy efficiency to help Albertans retrofit their homes. The fund would provide low-interest loans to be paid back over time with the money saved on energy bills.

Parks and Public Lands

Protect Alberta parks and special places from environmental damage.

Halt the current plan to sell off public lands.

Register all Crown resource dispositions (forestry, mines, minerals and public land resources) to eliminate the practice of selling public lands without public scrutiny.

Design a comprehensive land-use policy for all public lands in Alberta based on the principles of conservation biology.

Intensive Livestock Operations

Require health impact assessments before approving intensive livestock operations, expand the definition of "affected party" and strengthen environmental assessments and enforcement.

Water Management

Establish an arms-length standing committee to develop a province-wide water management strategy.

Map Alberta's groundwater resources, so we understand how much water we have and where it is located.

Implement measures to protect Alberta's remaining wetlands.

Meter all connections to public water supplies.

Review water-intensive industries to ensure they are using the best available technologies.

Publish watershed management plans on a scheduled timeline.

End the use of fresh water for oil well injection.

Prohibit bulk sales of Alberta water.

Review provincial testing processes for drinking water.

Establish and protect in-stream flows before allocating any excess.

Coal Bed Methane (CBM)

Before embracing this emerging industry, develop new regulations to address potential environmental issues and landowner concerns specific to CBM extraction.

Sour Gas

Fund a comprehensive scientific study to determine the impact of sour gas flaring on human and animal health.

Sustainability for Rural Alberta

For more than 100 years, farmers and ranchers have played an integral role in our economy and our identity as a province. Now, all Albertans should be prepared to stand with them as they grapple with crises beyond their control.

We must also look to underlying issues that threatened rural sustainability long before BSE and successive years of drought took their toll.

The Alberta Liberals believe the independent farmer and rancher is too important to our history – and our future – to be allowed to disappear from our province. We believe that the best solutions will come from local producers, and that government's role is to energetically support their efforts.

To move rural Alberta forward, the Alberta Liberals will focus on helping rural communities explore economic development opportunities and removing barriers to their success.

Focus. Forward.

The Liberal Plan for Rural Alberta

Encourage a home-grown meat-packing industry by taking the following steps to support Alberta entrepreneurs:

- Provide infrastructure for water, roads and land to help get new packing plants off the ground.
- Appoint a “beef czar” reporting directly to the Premier—an Albertan with an ear to the ground in the cattle industry, the environment, trade and the needs of local authorities—instructed to move the industry forward.
- Set a monthly slaughter cap of 10 per cent on the self-owned herds of the “big three” meat packers.
- Restrict market share and control of the “big three” meat packers until healthy market conditions return. This may involve capping the processing capacity of these companies and placing a moratorium on their purchase of new Alberta-based processing companies.

Recognize the authority of the Canadian Wheat Board, and require that any change in its jurisdiction be through a referendum of producers.

Develop new funding formulas for rural health services to reflect the special challenges and higher costs of delivering those services in sparsely populated regions.

Implement strategies to address shortages of physicians and other health care professionals in rural areas:

- Provide ongoing support, including continuing education components, facility upgrading and spousal employment opportunities.
- Develop incentive programs to encourage new medical graduates to move to rural areas.

Maintain the current number of elected rural school boards, to keep the control of rural education in local hands.

Protect rural schools from closure by supporting them in forming partnerships with community groups to become Community Schools, housing a range of services.

Assistance for Seniors

Today's seniors are not content to watch life from the sidelines. Many are involved in their communities, and engaged in the issues that affect them and their families.

Over the past decade, the loss of seniors' benefits and programs have caused growing financial concern for independent seniors. Many are finding it harder to pay their monthly bills and enjoy their retirement. Recent government announcements promise some seniors a break from rising costs, but more must be done.

Ill and frail seniors are at even greater risk. Substandard care linked to cost-cutting in nursing homes has increased their vulnerability, sometimes with tragic consequences.

To move Alberta forward, the Alberta Liberals will focus on restoring key seniors' benefits and put in place measures to ensure all seniors can live safe and comfortable lives.

Focus. Forward.

The Liberal Plan to Assist Seniors

Independent Seniors

Restore extended health benefits for seniors to help pay for dental and optical needs.

Maintain the commitment to eliminate health care premiums for seniors.

Inflation-proof the Alberta Seniors Benefit by indexing it to the Alberta Consumer Price Index.

Seniors Needing Care

Introduce a "Standards of Care Act" to ensure first-rate care within seniors' care facilities.

Implement standards of training for all seniors' care attendants regardless of where they work.

Appoint a Long-Term Care Ombudsman to monitor seniors' care facilities and to investigate complaints of elder abuse.

Replace the *Nursing Home Act* with a more comprehensive piece of legislation addressing, among other issues:

- standardized staffing levels
- licensing and regulating in supportive housing and assisted living settings
- expanded public coverage
- development of a Seniors' Response Protocol to better meet the needs of seniors in emergency rooms and primary care centres

Labour Relations

The Alberta Liberals believe in fair and equitable treatment of the workforce. Workers deserve to be valued and treated with respect.

A healthy relationship between workers and employers depends on balancing the expectations of each – workers have the right to expect a fair price for their labour, and employers have the right to expect an economic return for their investment.

Workers also have the right to expect a safe workplace, and a responsibility to not deliberately or through carelessness put themselves or their coworkers at risk. Workplace injuries and deaths are preventable, and government must work with labour and industry to ensure the highest standards of safety are maintained in this province.

To move labour relations forward in Alberta, the Alberta Liberals will focus on reviewing and updating the regulatory framework, increasing the accountability of employers and workers for workplace safety and ensuring that injured workers are treated fairly and equitably.

Focus. Forward.

The Alberta Liberal Plan for Labour Relations

Thoroughly review, modernize and strengthen the Labour Relations Code in consultation with all stakeholders.

Hire an adequate number of Occupational Health and Safety inspectors.

Ensure high standards of job skill training for Alberta apprentices.

Vigorously enforce the Labour Relations Code and Employment Standards, strengthen government enforcement of work-site safety regulations and end ineffective “voluntary compliance” programs for repeat violators.

Oppose “right-to-work” legislation.

Establish direct first-contract certification.

Prohibit the use of replacement workers during the course of a legal labour dispute.

Establish an independent public inquiry, including an intensive audit, into the operations of the WCB.

Human Rights and Social Justice

While most Albertans enjoy a standard of living the envy of much of Canada, there is another Alberta.

Despite our province's affluence, children grow up in poverty, even when their parents work full-time. Albertans unable to work struggle to pay for even their most basic needs.

The Alberta Liberals believe the benchmark of a caring society is how we treat our most vulnerable citizens. Alberta should be a province of hope and opportunity, of respect and dignity – not of hunger or despair.

To move Alberta forward, the Alberta Liberals will focus on finding ways to break the cycle of poverty, ensuring citizens on lower incomes are able to live in dignity and encouraging the involvement of underrepresented Albertans in government decision-making.

Focus. Forward.

The Liberal Plan for Human Rights and Social Justice

Immediately increase rates for AISH (Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped) by \$150 per month.

Increase Alberta Works payments by \$150 per month.

Using the Market Basket Measure, review AISH and Alberta Works rates annually to ensure that they continue to meet the basic needs of individuals and families.

Immediately raise the minimum wage to \$7 per hour.

Submit the minimum wage rate to an annual review by an independent committee which includes representation by workers and small businesses.

Increase funding for Early Childhood Development for vulnerable children.

Provide incentives to build more affordable housing.

Work to ensure gender and cultural groups are represented on legislative committees.

Support and defend the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*.

Fiscal and Economic Leadership

Thanks to a windfall of energy revenues over the past two years, Alberta is poised for a tremendous leap. From experience, we know this can't last.

The Alberta Liberals believe it's time to start translating our current energy boom into permanent prosperity and the opportunity to build a truly remarkable future.

To move Alberta forward, the Alberta Liberals will focus on spending smarter, revitalizing the Heritage Fund and working with industry and education partners to prepare strategically for a post-petroleum era.

Focus. Forward.

The Liberal Plan for Fiscal and Economic Leadership

Fiscal Policy

Balanced budgets every year.

No provincial sales tax.

Provide a tax cut for families and businesses by eliminating health care premiums for all Albertans.

Inflation-proof the Heritage Fund.

Surplus Policy

Invest 35 per cent of annual budget surpluses into the Heritage Fund.

Invest 35 per cent of annual budget surpluses into a Post-Secondary Education Endowment Fund to support education excellence and address accessibility issues.

Invest 25 per cent of annual budget surpluses into a Capital Account toward responsibly eliminating the province's \$8 billion infrastructure debt within 10 years. Once that debt is paid off, review the scope of the Capital Account.

Invest 5 per cent of annual budget surpluses up to \$500 million into an Endowment Fund for the Humanities, Social Sciences and Arts to supplement existing funding and encourage development in these fields.

Research & Development and Business Incentives

Establish provincial policy to direct the research and commercialization of cleaner energy and renewable energy initiatives in Alberta.

Implement a 10 per cent provincial tax credit for eligible expenditures in scientific research and experimental development.

Implement a 30 per cent provincial tax credit for investment in qualified early-stage Alberta-based technology companies.

Create a \$150 million Alberta Technology Venture Fund – funded jointly by industry, universities and government – to generate a venture capital industry in Alberta.

Introduce a 20 per cent Alberta Film and Television Tax Credit for Alberta-owned and controlled production companies, on accredited Alberta expenditures.

Create a provincial technology program to harmonize technology commercialization programs across the province.

Establish a Red Tape Commission, comprised of representatives from the provincial government, local governments and the private sector, to cut – not amalgamate – government regulations that impose an undue regulatory burden on the business sector.

Support the Agreement on Internal Trade (AIT) as a means of cutting inter-provincial employment, trade and investment barriers.