

Platform 2004: Agenda for Change




**A stronger voice.
A better choice.**

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Agenda for Change

Dear friend,

This election is about the kind of Alberta we want. We are blessed with natural resources and hardworking people building a strong province. These blessings provide us with choices about our future. I believe Albertans deserve better than what the Conservatives have given us. We can have a prosperous economy, a clean environment and wise investment in health care and education. We just need better decisions from our government.

The Alberta NDP is offering you an **Agenda for Change** in this election. It is an agenda that straightens out the priorities of our government and looks to the interests of Alberta families for setting the direction of our province.

I believe we are at an important time in Alberta. We are at the beginning of a new era in our province, and we need to make sure we are making the best possible choices for our future.

In the pages that follow you will find new and creative ideas about how to address the issues that concern Alberta families. These ideas were crafted with you in mind – how best to represent your interests and address the issues that matter most to you.

Our excellent team of Alberta NDP candidates have new ideas for stabilizing and strengthening our health and education systems. We have a plan for making your neighbourhood safer. And we will put more money back into your pocketbook by fixing Tory mistakes and scrapping health care premiums.

Want to learn more? Well, keep reading. I hope you find our **Agenda for Change** the kind of solutions you are looking for.

Sincerely,



Brian Mason

Leader, Alberta NDP

1 Better Protection for Your Pocketbook

// Hasn't this government cost you enough? Albertans deserve better protection for their pocketbook. Brian Mason and the Alberta NDP will work to make sure the Alberta advantage ends up in your pocket. //

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Better Protection for Your Pocketbook

Introduction





Albertans want good value for their money. Whether it is tax dollars, insurance premiums or paying for the necessities of life, Albertans want to know they will get good service at a good price. It only makes sense.

Unfortunately, during the past four years the Conservatives have not paid attention to the pocketbooks of Alberta families. As a result, you are paying more and getting less in return. Higher health care premiums. Skyrocketing home heating and electricity bills. Highest auto insurance premiums in western Canada. Endless increases in user fees and hidden charges. And what are we getting for all this extra money? The Conservatives continue to cut funding to important services and programs.

Hasn't this government cost you enough? Albertans deserve better protection for their pocketbook.

Brian Mason and the Alberta NDP will work to make sure the Alberta advantage ends up in your pocket, and not the bank accounts of meat packing plants, large corporations and other Tory friends.

The Alberta NDP's **Agenda for Change** includes a comprehensive fiscal package that safeguards Alberta's balanced budget and puts more money back into your pocketbook, making life more affordable.

-  Eliminate health care premiums, saving over \$1,000 for Alberta families
-  A "consumer-first" policy for electricity and natural gas
-  Lower auto premiums through public auto insurance
-  A commitment to balanced budgets every year




Eliminating Health Premiums: Medicine for your Wallet

The Alberta NDP will eliminate health care premiums for every Albertan, saving Alberta families more than \$1,000 each year, and reducing administration costs for Alberta businesses and government.

The Conservatives increased premiums by 30%, which is an extra \$240 out of your family's pocket. They then cynically announced on the eve of the election the elimination of premiums for seniors. The Alberta NDP believes all Albertans deserve this tax break.

The Alberta NDP will make up for the lost revenue by cancelling corporate tax cuts scheduled for 2005 and beyond, and by implementing effective health care reforms to strengthen our public health care system.

Eliminating health premiums will save money for the government, for businesses and, most importantly for your family:

-  You save over \$1,000 each year
-  The government saves \$65 million in reduced administration costs and yearly write-offs for bad debts
-  Business saves on payroll costs

// We need better ways to finance our health care system. The health premium is regressive and ineffective. The time has come to put an end to it. //

Public Auto Insurance: Better Deal, Stronger Coverage






Albertans pay the highest auto insurance in Western Canada, because Alberta is alone in using a for-profit auto insurance system. The Alberta NDP will work for a public auto insurance system in Alberta, similar to systems in the Manitoba, Saskatchewan and B.C, which were all implemented by NDP governments.

// Public auto insurance works because it will lower your personal rates by 35% and increase the overall protection provided to you and other drivers. //

Under the Conservatives, insurance rates have spiked 57%. The Tory attempt to fix the system will give most drivers a reduction of less than 5%. Compensation for minor injuries is now unfairly capped at \$4000. Under the Tory plan, Edmonton drivers pay more than Calgary drivers, just because of where they live.

The current system also doesn't effectively prevent thousands of drivers from operating their vehicle without insurance, putting all of us at risk.

Public auto insurance will lower your personal rates by 35% and increase the overall protection provided to you and other drivers. Here is how it works:

-  35% reduction in premiums due to non-profit status and administrative efficiency
-  Creation of an independent watchdog to ensure fair rates
-  Removal of the "cap" on compensation to accident victims
-  A guarantee that all drivers are insured by linking insurance with vehicle registration
-  Substantial investments in traffic and road safety programs to reduce accidents

Consumers First! Lowering Your Home Utility Costs






Remember the days when your power bill didn't empty your wallet? Brian Mason and the Alberta NDP want to make home utilities affordable again. The NDP has a "Consumers First" plan for electricity and home heating costs.

The bottom line of the Conservative's failed deregulation experiments is that Albertans are paying much higher home utility bills. Bills are up between 60% and 100%. Natural gas rates have more than doubled. Just before the last election the Conservatives trotted out a rebate to hide the problem. In all, this mistake has cost Albertans more than \$4 billion in increased rates and \$4 billion in politically-motivated rebates. That is \$2,600 for every Albertan.

Brian Mason's NDP will take care of consumers first. We will ensure electricity and home heating rates become more affordable and more stable. We will also increase the production of green energy options, such as wind and solar.




Consumers First Electricity Rates

The Alberta NDP will scrap failed Tory electricity deregulation and implement a sensible regulatory framework giving consumers affordable prices and provides electricity producers with a stable, profitable environment.

-  Electricity rates based on the cost of generation plus a reasonable return for generators
-  Firm targets requiring generators to produce green power
-  Renewed focus on energy conservation
-  Interest-free loans available to consumers to increase their home energy efficiency, paid back through savings on their energy bill
-  Consumer watchdog to prevent excessive rate increases

Consumers First Natural Gas Rebates

The Alberta NDP will work for a natural gas rebate program that offers stable, predictable protection to consumers when they need it, not just at election time.

-  Consumers receive a full rebate for any natural gas price that is more than 20% above the five-year average - currently, the rebate would automatically kick in at prices over \$4.80 per gigajoule
-  Financed through a portion of the extra royalties
-  Homeowners, small business, family farms, municipalities, hospitals, schools and non-profit organizations will be eligible







A Better Eye on the Books: the Fiscal Balance Sheet

Brian Mason and the Alberta NDP know Albertans pride themselves on their fiscal prudence. We commit to maintaining the same common sense approach to finances that Alberta families use for their own households. Just as it is not wise to spend more than we earn, it is also unwise to pay down the mortgage but not have enough money for food and clothing.

Albertans deserve a better approach to wise management of our wealth and at the same time our hospitals and schools need stable funding to serve Alberta families.





The Alberta NDP commits to maintain a balanced budget every year, meet our present needs and save for the future. The NDP will also put more money back in your pocket. Under our plan, the average Albertan will save \$1500 a year in taxes and premiums.

Our key fiscal promises:

-  A balanced budget every year
-  Adequate funding to hospitals and schools all the time, not just at election time
-  Elimination of health care premiums – saving Alberta families over \$1,000
-  Cutting school property taxes by half over four years– saving average homeowners \$500
-  Unexpected surpluses to go into capital spending, strengthening the Heritage Fund and addressing genuine emergencies
-  Cancel corporate tax cuts scheduled for 2005 and beyond. Small business tax reductions to be maintained

New Priorities for government Revenues

The Alberta NDP will change government priorities to benefit Alberta families instead of powerful friends of the government.

-  Scrap the Royalty Tax Credit for oil sands companies and scale back other royalty reduction programs
-  Introduce a royalty windfall surcharge on oil prices that exceed \$25 US a barrel and on natural gas prices that exceed \$4 per gigajoule.
-  Require Alberta Treasury Branches to pay an annual dividend to support schools and hospitals
-  End the taxation on Blue Cross earnings and use savings to lower extended health and dental premiums

2 Building a Stronger Health Care System

// We deserve a government that will make health care its first priority. The problems in health care can be fixed - we just need to make better choices. That is the core of the Alberta NDP plan for solving the health care crisis – putting the needs of patients first. //

Introduction






A well-functioning, accessible health care system is one of the most important things a government can provide its citizens. Alberta has the capacity to offer one of the world's best health systems.

Yet, due to the Conservatives our health care system is spinning through crisis after crisis. It is the direct result of ten years of cutbacks, mismanagement and poor decisions. Instead of rolling up its sleeves to fix the problems, the Conservatives play with privatization schemes and fantasy solutions, such as serving wine in hospital rooms.

Albertans deserve better. We deserve a government that will make health care its first priority. The problems in health care can be fixed – we just need to make better choices.

The challenges facing health care are real and we can't keep doing things the same way. We need real reforms to fix them. And the best way to do that is to modernize the system while expanding and strengthening its public, non-profit principles. The core of the Alberta NDP plan for solving the health crisis is putting the needs of patients first.

The Alberta NDP's **Agenda for Change** offers ideas on how to stabilize and strengthen the health care system, while at the same time encouraging healthier lifestyles and prevention.

-  Stable funding for hospitals and health professionals – so you get health care when you need it
-  Hire more nurses and other health care providers
-  Firm targets for waiting times – so you get care sooner
-  A ban on private, for-profit clinics using public dollars
-  Creation of an Pharmaceutical Savings Agency to bulk purchase drugs to curtail spiraling drug costs

// Brian Mason and the Alberta NDP will make shortening waiting lists the first priority for health care. //

Building a Stronger Health Care System







Health Care When You Need It

When you or a member of your family are ill, you need to know that health care will be available when you need it. Brian Mason and the Alberta NDP will make shorter wait lists the first priority for health care.

The Conservatives created the problem through their cuts and mismanagement. The problem can be fixed, but not by the people who created it in the first place.

We need better management of surgery lists, with a central waiting list registry and better tracking of patients. We need to build the capacity to move resources to where they are most needed.

The Alberta NDP **Agenda For Change** will focus on fixing real problems. We will make sure more nurses, technicians, family doctors and ambulances are on the job to ensure a faster response to your health needs. We will make sure hospitals get the funding they need all the time, not just at election time.






-  Provide funding to Regional Health Authorities in three-year cycles
-  Hire 2,000 more nurses and other frontline health providers to ease the stress in hospitals
-  Increase enrolment in nursing and other health professional schools to meet a growing shortage
-  Firm targets for wait lists, a central registry and better management of wait lists
-  Incentives for doctors to set up in smaller communities
-  Specialized surgery centres within the public system to streamline certain backlogged procedures

No More Privatization Experiments

Albertans know that public health care works when it is properly supported. All available evidence demonstrates that public health systems deliver better quality health care more cheaply than private systems. In other words, we get more service for less cost – the definition of a good deal. The Alberta NDP will end the drift toward more private, for-profit health care and put priority on fixing the public system.

Despite all the evidence, the Conservatives continue on a drive to privatize our health system. They are proposing user fees for health services, and a doubling of health premiums. The Tory plan will not shorten one wait list, but will mean more money out of your wallet to pay for core health services.

Privatization is creeping in through the increasing use of private MRI and CAT scan clinics and the use of “private-public partnerships” to build new facilities. The Alberta NDP promise to clarify the rules around diagnostic clinics and to ensure facilities are built in the most cost-effective way.

-  Ban the use of public dollars at private, for-profit health facilities in Alberta, including MRI and cataract surgery clinics
-  Create specialized clinics within the public system to improve care, shorten wait times and save money
-  Support extending the Canada Health Act to include MRI and CAT scan clinics
-  Ensure all health facilities are built using public financing – no P3s
-  Fully elect Regional Health Authority boards







// All available evidence demonstrates that public health systems deliver better quality health care more cheaply. //

Health Care Reform – Effective Solutions

The Alberta NDP commits to making health care sustainable for the next generation. We need new ways to deliver health care more effectively. We need to explore new ways of organizing health professionals to make smarter use of our money. And the much neglected parts of our health care system – long term care, homecare and mental health – deserve better attention.

The Alberta NDP's **Agenda for Change** offers new and creative ideas for reforming our health care system.

One of the key elements is the creation of new primary health care clinics. These clinics will operate 24 hours a day and offer a wide range of services. Health professionals will work as a team to offer the best patient care in a more relaxed setting than an emergency room.

-  Create more community-based primary health care centres
-  Expand alternative payment programs for physicians, including capitation and salaries instead of fee-for-service
-  Expand homecare as an effective form of health care delivery, including respite care for caregivers
-  Revamp long term care – lower accommodation charges, enhanced staffing standards to improve care, add new beds built and operated by health authorities and non-profit groups
-  Establish community-based teams of mental health professionals to offer quick response to patient crises and to offer family support
-  Expand the use of nurse practitioners

// We need new ways to deliver health care more effectively. We need to explore new ways of organizing health professionals to make smarter use of our money. And the much neglected parts of our health care system – long term care, homecare and mental health – deserve better attention. //

// The cornerstone of our plan is to create the Alberta Pharmaceutical Savings Agency to lower drug prices. The Agency would be the first step towards a universal Pharmacare program. //

Building a Stronger Health Care System





Prescription Drugs: Improving Quality, Lowering Cost

The Alberta NDP believe if we want to make health care more sustainable, then we need to tackle rising prescription drug prices.

The single fastest growing expense in health care is prescription drugs. These rising prices take away needed money from other parts of the health care system. But most importantly, these prices hit you directly in your pocketbook, when you pay for your prescription or in rising health plan rates.

Brian Mason and the Alberta NDP have a plan to lower prescription drug prices and ease the pressure on both your wallet and the health care budget.

The cornerstone of our plan is to create the Alberta Pharmaceutical Savings Agency to lower drug prices. It would have four mandates:

-  Bulk-purchase prescription medication sold at pharmacies and used by health authorities - lowering prices by 6% to 10% within the first two years
-  Implement strategies to reduce unnecessary demand for drugs, including education, prevention, alternative therapies when appropriate and a review of drug marketing practices
-  Adopt a reference-based pricing strategy - use lower cost options when proven to offer equal health outcomes
-  Phase in expanded public coverage for prescription medication, paid by savings earned from other Agency actions








Saving Money by Preventing Illness

One of the most effective means for making our health system sustainable is a strong program of health promotion and illness prevention. The Alberta NDP will place renewed importance on this silent giant of the health care system.

For too long, promotion and prevention have operated at the edges of the health system. Health policy has focussed on treatment and cure, leaving little room for a more preventative approach. Not only can we improve Albertans health, we can save the health system millions of dollars by expanding promotion and prevention programs.

The Alberta NDP has a plan for bringing health promotion and illness prevention into the centre of the health care system.

-  Increase funding for promotion and prevention
-  Use new primary health clinics as centres for education on lifestyle, nutrition, environmental protection and other promotion activities
-  Encourage pro-active prevention of illness, such as regular check-ups, breast cancer screening, regular exercise and healthy eating
-  Help patients with chronic illnesses such as diabetes and asthma to manage their condition more effectively, preventing expensive hospital visits
-  Implement a province-wide ban on smoking in the workplace

3 Better Investments in the Future

// Funding education is an investment in our collective future. And making sure the investment is used wisely helps increase its value over time. //

Introduction

// Funding education is an investment in our collective future. And making sure the investment is used wisely helps increase its value over time. //

Alberta's future will be in the hands of today's children. We need to prepare them for their future and allow them to explore their own potential to the fullest. In short, we need an education system that can meet their needs today, so they can build our province tomorrow.

Schools in Alberta are trying their best to achieve this goal, but are being given a rough ride by the Conservatives. After a decade of cutbacks, layoffs, increased costs to parents and students and ever larger class sizes, Alberta's education system needs attention. But instead of attention, the Tories neglect it one day, and shower it with unfocussed money the next, as the election draws near.





This is no way to prepare our children for the future. This government is not working for Alberta children. Albertans deserve better.

Funding education is an investment in our collective future. And making sure the investment is used wisely helps increase its value over time.

The current system is too fragmented and disjointed. The three systems – early childhood, grade school and post-secondary – do little communication or coordination.

Brian Mason and the NDP want to change this, by taking a new approach. From pre-school to post-secondary graduation, the Alberta NDP strategy makes sure every young Albertan is ready to learn, able to learn and able to succeed.

Some of the highlights include:

-  Creation of parenting centres to offer resources and information to parents
-  Phased-in full-day kindergarten and half-day Junior Kindergarten for children at risk
-  Stable funding for schools and meaningful limits on class sizes
-  10% reduction in post-secondary tuition, followed by a tuition freeze






Ready to Learn – Early Childhood Investments

The Alberta NDP is committed to making sure every child in Alberta is ready to learn and able to reach their potential.

The Conservative approach to children isn't working. Daycare funding is inadequate and rates are unaffordable for many. Early intervention programs are spotty and chronically underfunded. We can do better.

Up to one in four Alberta children are not achieving their potential, because of poverty, hunger, poor nutrition, or insecure homes. A well-operated early childhood support system is able to identify these children early and provide the necessary support before they enter the school system, including affordable child care, parenting support and early intervention.

The Alberta NDP's "ready to learn" plan offers a number of strategies for ensuring all Alberta's children have the best possible educational opportunities.

-  Comprehensive pre and post-natal programmes for mothers and babies in families at risk
-  Parenting centres to provide parents with resources, information and assistance
-  Initiate full day kindergarten and junior kindergarten in schools where children are most at risk, with future expansion to schools where parents desire it
-  Better coordination of children's services, including health, welfare, education and justice
-  Ensure all families have access to affordable child care by reducing rates 50%, with increased funding to quality child care centres to help with upgrading of programs, staff training and staff salaries

Able to Learn – Stronger Public Education







The Alberta NDP is committed to making sure every child in school is able to learn, and receives the best possible education. We want to make our school system the envy of North America.

The Conservatives have sent schools and parents on a rollercoaster ride. First came cutbacks that sent class sizes climbing. Then more than 1,000 teachers were laid off. Then, just before an election, they cynically restored some of the funding to schools, which allowed some of those teachers to be rehired. But the strain is still showing on the system – we can see it in our stressed out teachers. Class sizes have dropped slightly for K to grade 3, but have not budged for grades 4 to 12.

We deserve better. The Alberta NDP has a two-part strategy for Alberta’s K-12 education system.





Stabilizing the System

The first step is to stabilize the system. Schools need a commitment for stable funding, an end to Tory-style election cycle spending and the money to fix and update aging infrastructure.

-  Predictable funding to school boards on three-year cycles
-  Bring down class sizes at all grades to where students can learn and set meaningful limits on class sizes
-  Eliminate fundraising for all school essentials, including computers, and make sure schools have the funds necessary to provide them
-  Finance repairing or replacing school infrastructure – and ensure schools can incorporate energy efficiency in renovations and upgrades
-  Reinvest in support staff, from custodians to counsellors to specialists like teacher librarians and phys ed teachers
-  Phase out funding for private schools and bring Charter Schools under the jurisdiction of school boards

Refocusing the System

The second step is to refocus the energies of the education system to making sure all Alberta children have a chance to succeed.

-  Improve funding and delivery of special needs programs, including ESL, reading recovery and academic challenge
-  Integrate schools into their communities by encouraging community use of space not used for classroom instruction
-  Strengthen a “citizenship” curriculum so students grow up able to actively participate in democratic society
-  Improve high school completion rates

// Brian Mason and the Alberta NDP will secure our investment in Alberta's future by putting post-secondary education back on the priority list. //

Better Investments in the Future

Able to Succeed – Better Access to Post-Secondary Education

The Alberta NDP believes that post-secondary education is about investing in our common future, and policy should reflect that reality.

Unfortunately, the Conservatives have put our college and university out of reach for many. In the past decade, tuition rates have tripled for students. At the same time, funding for institutions has fallen, leading to crumbling infrastructure and massive class sizes.

We can do better. Brian Mason and the Alberta NDP will secure our investment in Alberta's future by putting post-secondary education back on the priority list.

- 🌱 Rollback tuition by 10% immediately – saving students \$500 a year – and freeze tuition until completion of an independent review of post-secondary education
- 🌱 Appoint a Post-Secondary Learning Commission to examine and recommend changes to the post-secondary system to improve accessibility, affordability and learning conditions
- 🌱 Enhance student loan remissions
- 🌱 Enhance bursaries for lower income students
- 🌱 Address the infrastructure deficit of post-secondary institutions
- 🌱 Tightening accountability rules for private adult vocational schools to better protect the rights of students attending those schools
- 🌱 Re-instate the faculty recruitment and retention funding envelope
- 🌱 Outlaw differential tuition between faculties

4 Building Stronger Communities

// In Alberta we can decide to make strong communities a priority. The Alberta NDP will make it a priority. //






Introduction

Albertans deserve to live in safe, vibrant, healthy communities. The Government needs to listen to Albertans and work with them to create the kind of places where we all like to live. The Alberta NDP believes building strong communities should be a priority.

Unfortunately, the Conservatives have chosen not to make it a priority. As a result, people feel less safe walking their neighbourhood streets. We have too many families living in poverty. Many of our seniors live in deplorable conditions in long-term care homes. Municipalities are struggling under the burden of downloading and cutbacks. Workplaces have become less safe and less fair. And our arts and culture community is unable to reach full potential because the province does not support their vital work.

We deserve better. We can make better choices for our communities, and allow ourselves to build the communities we want.

Some of the highlights of the Alberta NDP's **Agenda for Change** for Alberta communities:

-  Put 500 new police officers on the beat through targeted funding for community policing
-  Restore seniors' benefits taken away by the Conservatives, and improve standards for residents in long term care
-  Increase minimum wage to \$8 per hour
-  Create a Green Energy Loan Fund for municipalities to pay for retrofits on their buildings
-  Set aside a small percentage of all large capital projects for the commission of new art projects to enhance public space

Safer Communities Through Community Policing







Many Albertans are concerned about the growing problem of minor property crime, such as thefts from garages and cars, vandalism and auto theft. They are tired of phoning the police just to wait on hold or be told to fill out a form. The Alberta NDP promise to address these concerns by finding more effective methods for controlling and preventing crime.

The Alberta NDP wants to put the “community” back into policing. Through “community policing” officers interact closely with people and businesses in the neighbourhood. They have local offices and spend their day walking through the neighbourhood, getting to know the neighbours. It is a proven method for reducing crime, increasing prevention and making people feel safer in their community.

Alberta also needs to enhance crime prevention programs to better tackle the root causes of crime.





Stronger Community Policing

Brian Mason and the Alberta NDP want make sure more police are on the beat, preventing crime before it happens by keeping a watchful eye. The NDP has a plan for better community policing.

-  Targeted funding to municipalities to fund community policing, with the money tied to hiring neighbourhood officers – 500 new officers over the next five years
-  Establish a Community Policing Foundation to research best practices in community policing
-  Establish response time targets when calls are made to report crimes
-  Provide smaller municipalities the option, with funding, to form regional police forces to encourage efficient use of resources and ensure police are more responsive to local needs
-  Ensure police forces better reflect the diversity of their community
-  Establish an independent body to investigate allegations of serious wrongdoing by police

Better Prevention Strategies

The best crime strategy is one that prevents crime from happening. The Alberta NDP would initiate a number of better crime prevention strategies.

-  Work with the Federal government to toughen sentences for home invasions and criminal gang activities
-  Stronger measures to stop spousal and child abuse, including stiffer sentences for violation of contact orders
-  Greater use of alternative measures, such as restitution, community service and “john school” for non-violent first time offenders
-  Measures to reduce poverty and family breakdown – affordable housing, Headstart programs, higher minimum wage, and learning opportunities for kids at risk







Fulfilling our Commitment to Seniors

Alberta's seniors built this province and gave us the communities we now enjoy. We have an obligation to ensure they are respected and treated with dignity. The Alberta NDP wants to restore our commitment to seniors.

Under the Conservatives, seniors have endured a difficult decade. Dental and eye benefits were cut. Health care premiums were hiked 30% before being eliminated in a cynical pre-election ploy.

Because of underfunding and privatization, many seniors live in deplorable conditions in long term care facilities. These places are understaffed and often inattentive to the needs of their residents. Operators are forced to cut corners and lower standards. The Conservatives' answer? Raise fees for residents by 50%.

The NDP will restore the benefits taken away in the past four years, and in doing so, return to seniors some of the respect they deserve.

-  Reverse the 50% hike in long-term care residential fees. Establish new, tougher standards for facilities, including staffing levels and quality of food and care
-  Add more long term beds in public and non-profit centres
-  Fully restore dental and eye care coverage eliminated in 2002
-  Construct more affordable, quality housing for seniors
-  Cut school property taxes in half – saving the average senior homeowner \$500 a year
-  Establish an independent Seniors Advocate to stand up for seniors' rights and investigate complaints








Municipalities Deserve Better

Municipalities and the services they provide are the backbone for our economy and our communities. Without the smooth operation of transportation and other infrastructure, emergency services, recreational facilities and community services, our lives would be far more challenging and difficult.

For a decade, the Conservatives have treated municipalities as insignificant. They have downloaded responsibilities without proper funding. They have cut back provincial shares of key funding arrangements, such as policing, infrastructure and transportation.

Municipalities deserve better. Albertans deserve better.

The Alberta NDP's **Agenda for Change** proposes a renewed commitment to making sure basic municipal services operate smoothly.

-  Kickstart LRT expansion for Edmonton and Calgary by offering dedicated capital funds
-  Offer the five cent fuel tax rebate to all municipalities
-  Negotiate long-term stable funding agreements to enable municipalities to address their infrastructure deficits
-  Establish a Green Energy Loan Program to allow municipalities to retro-fit buildings and use the savings generated to pay for it
-  Work with municipalities to encourage in-fill development and downtown revitalization, while discouraging urban sprawl
-  Build or renovate at least 1,000 new affordable housing units each year
-  Ensure all municipalities are treated equally

// Municipalities and the services they provide are the backbone for our economy and our communities. //

Saving Rural Communities

The last few years have not been easy for family farmers and rural communities in Alberta. The erosion of farm incomes has been a shameful feature of rural Alberta in the past decade. The family farm, the most desirable way to produce food, is in danger of extinction. And the onslaught of BSE has turned the situation into a full-blown crisis. And the Tories do nothing but sit and hope the border re-opens. Their only action was to provide BSE compensation that mostly went to huge meat packing companies making record profits.

Rural Albertans deserve better. They deserve a real commitment to solving the BSE crisis and to ensuring the long term survival of rural communities. The Alberta NDP's **Agenda for Change** tackles both of these issues.

Solving the BSE Crisis

- 🌱 Create a minimum floor price for cattle until the border re-opens
- 🌱 Prohibit packer-owned cattle, so packing companies cannot depress prices
- 🌱 Actively seek markets in Europe and Asia to reduce our dependency on the US
- 🌱 Universal BSE testing for all cows over 30 months of age
- 🌱 Promote competition in the meat packing industry by expanding slaughter capacity
- 🌱 BSE aid must be targeted to cattle farmers, and not packing companies, to make sure the money gets to who needs it the most

Long Term Commitments to Rural Alberta

- 🌱 Push for federal-provincial farm income programs to provide family farms with an adequate standard of living
- 🌱 Support the Wheat Board, producer cooperatives and orderly marketing
- 🌱 Support REAs and rural gas coops – proven at providing stable, affordable energy supplies
- 🌱 Encourage environmentally friendly farming practices – such as shelter belts, organic farming and maintaining woodlots
- 🌱 A comprehensive review of intensive livestock operations, including their environmental and water quality impacts
- 🌱 Enhance water quality monitoring in rural areas







Restoring Balance in the Workplace

Work is an important part of Albertans' lives. The Alberta government should therefore pay attention to workplace conditions. The Alberta NDP want to restore a proper balance in Alberta workplaces.







Under the Conservatives, workplaces have become more dangerous, less fair and less respectful. Our minimum wage is the lowest in the country. Our employment standards and labour relations laws are unbalanced and out of date. Enforcement of health and safety laws is spotty. Agricultural workers are denied even the most basic of protections.

Albertans deserve better. The Alberta NDP will create balance in the workplace between the interests of employers and the protection of workers.




Better Protections for All Workers

-  Raise the minimum wage to \$8 an hour, and link future increases to the cost of living
-  Pro-rated benefits for part-time workers
-  Extend employment standards protections to agricultural workers, on corporate farms and factories
-  Tougher health and safety rules, and better enforcement of those rules
-  Stronger provisions for workers to recover unpaid wages illegally withheld by employers
-  A ban on smoking in the workplace

Better Balance in Labour Relations

-  A ban on replacement workers during strikes and lockouts
-  Amend the Labour Code to reflect the Charter of Rights and Freedoms
-  Impose real penalties for employer interference in the union certification process
-  Authorize the Labour Relations Board to require binding arbitration or impose an agreement for first contract disputes
-  Automatic certification for unions who can demonstrate majority support for certification
-  Extend full collective bargaining, including the right to strike, to currently denied it public sector workers

Fairness for Injured Workers

-  Reform the WCB to put fair compensation for workers as the first priority, rather than cost reduction for employers
-  Finally establish a longstanding contentious claims review panel
-  Firmer controls on WCB executive compensation packages

// The cornerstone of the NDP's Agenda for Change in arts is the creation of a new Ministry of Arts and Culture. If the Tories can have a Ministry of Gaming, Alberta deserves a ministry for activities that bring life and vitality to our communities. //







Building Stronger Communities

Stronger Arts and Culture Means Stronger Communities

The arts and culture sector is a crucial and integral part of guaranteeing a high quality of life for Albertans – and creates jobs and economic development. The Alberta NDP will implement a comprehensive arts policy to reflect its importance to our communities.

The Conservatives have consistently underfunded arts and culture, and continue to consider arts peripheral to the life of Alberta. Alberta deserves better.

The cornerstone of the NDP's **Agenda for Change** in arts is the creation of a new Ministry of Arts and Culture. If the Tories can have a Minister of Gaming, Alberta deserves a minister for activities that bring life and vitality to our communities.






-  Create a separate Minister of Arts and Culture to coordinate arts funding and programs, and offer stable funding to arts groups
-  \$15 million in new funding for the Alberta Foundation for the Arts, and an end to political patronage at the Foundation
-  Allocate 1% of all large capital project budgets for the commission of art projects
-  Increase fine arts curriculum in elementary and secondary schools
-  Expand Alberta's network of museums, historical sites, libraries and galleries
-  Promote Alberta arts and artists on the national and international stage

Including All Albertans in Our Prosperity

Alberta is a prosperous province, but some Albertans do not enjoy the benefits of that prosperity. The Alberta NDP knows we can do better at making sure all Albertans have affordable housing, a good job and an income that allows them to meet the necessities of life. There is no reason for widespread poverty in a province as wealthy as ours.







Under the Conservatives, Alberta has the country's lowest minimum wage. People with disabilities and others living on fixed incomes struggle to pay the bills because their benefits are too low. Social Assistance recipients who want to find work are punished by loss of benefits. And low wage working families receive no support at all.

Albertans deserve better. We deserve a government that will measure its success by how it treats its most vulnerable citizens, rather than its most privileged citizens.

-  Raise minimum wage to \$8 an hour, and index to the cost of living afterward
-  Build 1,000 new units of affordable housing to ease the housing crisis
-  Make sure AISH and social assistance rates allow people to meet basic necessities of life by tying rates to a Market Basket Measure
-  Establish a Living Wage Taskforce to explore with employers, workers and municipalities the possibilities of "living wage protocols"
-  Early intervention for children living in poverty through hot lunch programs, junior kindergarten and other measures

Fairness for First Nations and Metis People

Health, social and economic indicators for First Nations and Metis people lag far behind every other community in the province. The Alberta NDP is committed to working with Aboriginal communities to find solutions to this situation.

-  Work with federal government to quickly and equitably settle unresolved land claims, such as the Lubicon Cree
-  Work to create local economic development in aboriginal communities, including targets for Aboriginal hiring in construction, resource development and the public sector
-  Improve housing supplies on Metis Settlements
-  Expand health and nutrition programs to foster illness prevention
-  Ensure Aboriginal child welfare services are provided by Aboriginal agencies
-  Ensure treaty rights are not undermined during resource development

5 Building a Stronger Democracy




// We deserve better. Democracy isn't an afterthought. It is the very foundation upon which our society is built. And it should be treated as such. //

Introduction




When you have a government that is arrogant and out-of-touch, one of the key casualties is democracy. They hide from the citizens and make decisions behind closed doors. They deny basic rights to portions of our population. They forget they work in the public interest and begin serving themselves and their friends first.

We deserve better. Democracy isn't an afterthought. It is the very foundation upon which our society is built. And it should be treated as such.

There are two fundamental parts to building a stronger democracy. First, we need to revamp how our democratic government is elected and operated. Decisions should be made openly and only after full public debate and discussion. Our democratic institutions need reform. Some highlights of our **Agenda for Change** include:

-  A Citizen's Assembly to recommend changes to the way we elect MLAs
-  Election finance reform, including banning corporate and union donations
-  Scrap the platinum handshake severance allowance which was recently doubled

The second part is a stronger commitment to human rights and equality for all Albertans. We can't proclaim to honour democracy and then deny basic rights to many citizens. We can't proclaim to be inclusive and then allow hidden barriers to the full participation of some Albertans.

-  Recognize the right of same-sex couples to marry
-  Eliminate barriers for qualified newcomers to work in their field
-  Increase funding to women's shelters





Making Sure Every Vote Counts

// ...the reform of our electoral system is a decision that should not be left to politicians alone. //

Elections are supposed to ensure every citizen has an equal voice and that every vote counts in picking the government. Alberta's current system of electing MLAs fails on that score.




The Alberta NDP supports a form of proportional representation for electing MLAs, a system that ensures every vote counts equally. However, the reform of our electoral system is a decision that should not be left to politicians alone. As a result, the Alberta NDP will institute a process for allowing Albertans to decide which electoral system they want.

The Alberta NDP will establish a Citizen's Assembly, where ordinary citizens are selected at random to examine the best system for electing MLAs. The Assembly's recommendations will be taken to a referendum on electoral reform. The process will look like this:

-  Two assembly participants, one from each gender, selected at random from all constituencies
-  Assembly would consult Albertans, access research from around the world and propose the best system for elections
-  The Assembly will recommend an electoral system, and the recommendation will be presented in a binding referendum of all Albertans
-  The results of the referendum take effect for the next provincial election

Getting Big Money out of Politics

The other weakness with our election system is that big donors have an undue influence over how campaigns are run and to whom candidates listen. To ensure MLAs and political parties listen to citizens – and not lobbyists – the Alberta NDP will:








-  Ban corporate and union financial donations to political parties
-  Set spending limits for party and candidate campaigns
-  Limit spending by third parties during election campaigns

Bringing Democracy Back to the Legislature

The Alberta NDP wants to make democracy a part of our daily life in Alberta.

The Conservative government has run rampant over democracy in the Alberta legislature. They have stopped listening to the concerns of Albertans, and have eliminated the avenues for citizens to express themselves at the Legislature.

Brian Mason and the NDP's **Agenda for Change** will implement a series of reforms to ensure government remains accountable to Albertans all the time, not just when they feel like it.

-  Fully elected Regional Health Authority Boards
-  Create a lobbyist registry to create transparency about who is twisting arms at the Legislature
-  Eliminate the Public Affairs Bureau, which is used as a Conservative propaganda machine
-  Strengthen conflict of interest rules to prevent former Tory insiders turning corporate lobbyists within weeks of leaving their jobs
-  Introduce a law requiring all vacancies on government boards, agencies and commissions be publicly advertised and appointments made based on merit, not patronage
-  Create all-party policy committees at the Legislature
-  Scrap the platinum handshake severance allowance Conservative and Liberal MLAs voted themselves






// The Conservative government has run rampant over democracy in the Alberta legislature. They have stopped listening to the concerns of Albertans, and have eliminated the avenues for citizens to express themselves at the Legislature. //

Protecting Human Rights for all Albertans

Protecting the fundamental rights of citizens needs to be more than empty rhetoric. It requires an active commitment on the part of government to support respect and diversity across all aspects of Alberta life. The Alberta NDP will make sure that all government policies and laws respect the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and will actively ensure all Albertans enjoy equal access to their fundamental rights.

The Conservative record on human rights is embarrassing. They have stripped the Human Rights and Citizenship Commission of its effectiveness. For years they have fought against major human rights decisions. They refuse to amend human rights legislation, even when both the courts and the Alberta public say they should be changed.

We deserve better. We deserve a government that actively supports and works for human rights. The Alberta NDP's Agenda for Change will correct this neglect of basic rights.

-  Recognize the legal right of same-sex couples to marry, and ensure equal treatment in matters of employment benefits, pensions, divorce and wills and estates
-  Properly resource the Human Rights Commission and ensure it has the capacity to enforce its rulings
-  Expand human rights education in schools
-  Eliminate barriers for qualified newcomers to work in their field
-  Ensure legislation is consistent with the Charter of Rights and Freedoms

// The Alberta NDP will make sure that all government policies and laws respect the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and will actively ensure all Albertans enjoy equal access to their fundamental rights. //




Continuing the Work Toward Women's Equality

Despite many gains made by women in the past decades, they continue to experience discrimination, inequality and violence at unacceptable levels. The Alberta NDP is committed to tackling the issues facing women and to work to achieve real gender equality in Alberta.






The Conservatives ignore women and their issues. Women pay the highest price for cuts to public services. Women are more likely to be the caregiver to the elderly parent not adequately supported by homecare. Women are more likely to struggle with balancing work, children and domestic work – the triple day. Women still earn less than men do for the same work.

All of these issues need addressing. Brian Mason and the NDP will continue the job of working for women's equality in Alberta.

Equality in the Workplace

-  Eliminate wage discrimination in public sector and in government contracts
-  Increased rules against workplace sexual harassment
-  Improved wages and benefits for child care workers

Equality in the Community

-  Increase funding for women's shelters, and increased support for abuse victims seeking long-term housing
-  Enhanced counselling and support services for women who have suffered abuse
-  Reduce child care fees by half and increase the number of affordable spaces available
-  Respite care and enhanced homecare services for caregivers of elderly, ill or disabled family members
-  Continued protection of a woman's right to reproductive choice and family planning services, covered by Medicare

6 Making Alberta a Greener Province

// We are fortunate to live in such a beautiful, majestic province blessed with natural resources. But with good fortune also comes responsibility. //







Introduction

We are fortunate to live in such a beautiful, majestic province blessed with natural resources. But with good fortune also comes responsibility. The mountains that tower over our western border and the rivers that meander through our hills and fields are thousands of years old. It is essential we do everything we can to ensure that they remain healthy and clean for thousands of years more, so that our future generations can share in the fortune we have.

There are many environmental challenges facing us, unfortunately most of our own making. Our activities threaten the quality of our water and air. We are extracting our natural resources – forests, water, oil and gas – in an unsustainable fashion, threatening our future economic prosperity. We are encroaching on rare and vulnerable habitat and species, putting them at risk of extinction. And then there is climate change, which threatens to upset the delicate ecological balance, not only Alberta, but for the entire world.

A greener Alberta will not only improve our quality of life, but also build a stronger, more efficient economy.

The Alberta NDP's **Agenda for Change** focuses on fixing the crisis spots, but also articulates a vision for what Alberta can look like, if we put our minds to it. Some highlights include:






-  A Green Fund to offer green retro-fitting grants to homeowners and businesses, and extending LRT
-  Expand network of public laboratories to ensure safe drinking water and to monitor the state of our rivers and lakes
-  Phasing out of sour gas flaring and venting
-  New requirements for the production of electricity from green sources

The Alberta Green Fund: Thinking About Our Future

The cornerstone of the Alberta NDP environment plan is the creation of the Alberta Green Fund. This fund will be used to finance initiatives to help Alberta families and businesses become more energy efficient and adapt more environmentally sustainable practices, using the revenue we earn in the good years to plan for the future.

The Fund will be used to finance a wide range of programs and projects that promote green options and green industries. Many of the projects will help Alberta families save money on their home utility costs and transportation expenses. Others will help business become more green without putting good jobs at risk.

Initially, the Fund will finance a number of initiatives:

-  A revolving loan fund with interest-free loans to homeowners and business to do energy retrofits to improve energy efficiency and lower utility bills - to be repaid through energy cost savings
-  Grants to municipalities to improve public transit
-  Initial financing of municipal Green Energy Loan Fund, which allows municipalities to retrofit buildings and pay the costs through energy cost savings
-  Municipal grants for improving sewage treatment, water quality and water use efficiency
-  Clean up of toxic hotspots, while maintaining commitment to polluter-pay

// The cornerstone of the Alberta NDP environment plan is the creation of the Alberta Green Fund. This fund will be used to finance initiatives to help Alberta families and businesses become more energy efficient and adapt more environmentally sustainable practices. //

Better Management of Natural Resources





Alberta's rich supply of water, fresh air, forests and land is a treasure we must work to not squander. The Alberta NDP believe we need strategies for managing these resources in a sustainable way.

Under the Conservatives, Alberta receives failing grades from the Sierra Club and other conservation organizations for its environmental record.






We must do better. Albertans deserve a stronger commitment to environmental management of our resources.

Brian Mason and the Alberta NDP know we need to think longer term when planning how to best use our natural resources. Our Agenda for Change will ensure quality air, good water, abundant forests and fertile soil remain an Alberta legacy for generations to come.






Keeping Water Safe and Clean

-  Ban fresh water exports and interbasin transfers of water
-  Invest in public health laboratories to ensure safe drinking water and to monitor the condition of Alberta's rivers, lakes and groundwater
-  Empower Department of Environment to conduct environmental impact assessments on all projects affecting water supply
-  Phase out use of fresh water in enhanced oil recovery

Fresh Air and Good Soil

-  Phase out sour gas flaring and venting as a risk to human and animal health
-  Repeal the Consolidated Farm Holding Program, which has allowed public grazing leases to be sold to private interests without regard to ranchers or the environment
-  Moratorium on coal bed methane projects until a study on its impacts on water and agriculture
-  Initiatives to reduce smog and ground level ozone levels in cities
-  Curb Urban Sprawl

Sustainable Forestry

-  End overcutting of Alberta's forests and establish new sustainable harvest levels more accurately reflecting current ecological science
-  Prevent sale of public forest lands
-  Encourage industry to move away from clear cut methods to selective cutting
-  Lower emissions limits on pulp mills, especially organochlorines
-  Promote more value-added wood production to keep good jobs in Alberta

// There is room in Alberta for both economic activity and preservation of unique and vulnerable habitat. //





Making Alberta a Greener Province

Protecting Alberta's Natural Areas

Our natural areas are one of Alberta's best assets. It brings thousands of visitors to our province and it provides a point of pride for Albertans. Brian Mason and the Alberta NDP know we must actively take care of these areas, or they will quickly disappear.

The Conservatives have neglected these areas, and put them at risk by allowing resource development activities in provincial parks and wilderness areas.

There is room in Alberta for both economic activity and preservation of unique and vulnerable habitat. The Alberta NDP's Agenda for Change respects the need for continued economic development, but knows that it cannot occur at the price of losing our wilderness areas. Action is needed to protect these areas. This is how we will act:

-  Phase out mining and drilling activities in protected areas
-  Meet the U.N. target of protecting 12 percent of Alberta's land area, ensuring all ecological areas are represented
-  Promote the Yellowstone to Yukon Corridor, a wilderness protection area along the eastern Rocky Mountain slopes
-  End privatization of provincial park operations, which has proven costly and inefficient

