

# Alberta's Opportunity

## PUTTING DEMOCRACY BACK ON TRACK

**POLICIES TO RENEW DEMOCRACY  
AND MAKE GOVERNMENT OPEN,  
TRANSPARENT AND ACCOUNTABLE**

*Government honesty,  
accountability and  
transparency aren't just*

*abstract ideals — they protect Albertans and ensure that their  
tax dollars are being used honestly and effectively.*

A strong, robust democracy could have protected seniors from neglect and abuse in Alberta's long-term care facilities. It could have prevented energy deregulation, which has cost Albertans billions of dollars in skyrocketing power bills and the subsidies needed to keep those bills under control. And it could have forced the government to develop a solid plan for managing Alberta's growth while protecting our environment.

It's time to give citizens back the tools they need to hold the government accountable. And it's time for the governments we elect to make openness and accountability not merely a promise, but an everyday reality.



Our policy will:

- Bring openness, accountability and transparency back to government
- Ensure that elections are free and fair for all Albertans
- Give all Alberta's voters a stronger voice in the Legislature

alberta**liberal**caucus

# DEMOCRATIC RENEWAL

## Fixed Election Dates

Election schedules should be free from political manipulation. They should occur at predictable intervals, rather than at the whim of the party in power. Voters already enjoy fixed elections in British Columbia and Ontario.

## Citizen's Assembly on Electoral Reform

The more people vote, the more legitimate and accountable the government. Many Albertans would be more likely to vote if our electoral system produced results that fairly represented all Albertans. An Alberta Liberal government would organize a Citizen's Assembly on Electoral Reform, to determine if other voting systems — including proportional representation — could improve participation and representation in our democracy. Citizens should be able to choose not merely which party takes power, but *how* their governments are elected.

## Election Financing Reform

No one should be able to buy the loyalty of our elected officials. An Alberta Liberal government would limit corporate and union donations to \$5000. Furthermore, party leadership campaigns would be subject to legislative rules, to ensure that the process of leadership selection is transparent and accountable.

# GREATER ACCOUNTABILITY

## Create a Lobbyist Registry

In a democracy, everyone has the right to urge the government to take a particular course of action. But professional lobbyists, funded by special interest groups, often have a great deal of influence over government decisions. That's why citizens have a right to know which individuals and organizations are attempting to influence government policy. Because professional lobbyists have so much impact on government policy, they should be publicly registered. Citizens should know who is being paid by whom to lobby which cabinet ministers or government officials.

## Fight Conflicts of Interest

Conflicts of interest occur whenever someone in a position of power can exploit the system for personal gain. Alberta's conflict of interest rules and oversight are incredibly weak compared to other provinces and the federal government. To protect Albertans from conflicts of interest, an Alberta Liberal Government would:

- Make sure that ex-politicians and senior political officials wait one year before taking jobs where they could influence government
- Extend conflicts of interest rules to Regional Health Authority officials
- Restructure the Legislative Offices Committee so that the selection of the Ethics Commissioner (who enforces ethics rules) is less dominated by the party in power.



## **Strengthen the Auditor General**

The adscam scandal proved how important it is to have governments scrutinized by a truly independent

auditor general. By restructuring the Legislative Offices Committee, an Alberta Liberal government would ensure that the appointment of the Auditor General would be non-partisan. And we would change legislation to make the AG much more effective at protecting taxpayer dollars and reducing government waste and inefficiency. Instead of performing a simple systems audit, which only determines if administrative systems are adequate, the Auditor General would have the mandate to “follow the money” to determine if Albertans are truly getting value for their taxpayer dollars.

## **Amend FOIP Act to increase Government Transparency**

We would amend the Freedom of Information & Protection of Privacy (FOIP) Act to ensure that Albertans get timely, affordable access to government publications. And we would end political interference in processing FOIP requests, including penalties for interference.

The FOIP Act is intended to give Albertans access to important government documents. In the best case, this information can be used to help ordinary Albertans hold their government accountable. But as it stands, requests through FOIP can take months to process and cost thousands of dollars. Often, requests are delayed, refused, or made unaffordable for purely political ends.



## **Provide Whistleblower Protection**

Whistleblowers have served the public immensely by courageously revealing government incompetence or corruption – often at the cost of their own jobs. We’ll protect whistleblowers with legislation, so that anyone who spots legitimate wrongdoing can feel free to speak out.

## **Make Lottery Boards Non-Partisan**

Lottery funds shouldn’t be a Tory slush fund. An Alberta Liberal government would return control of the lottery granting process to communities, who know best how to use the money.

The proceeds of lotteries were once distributed by community lottery boards, set up by municipalities to serve the interests of their citizens. But in 2002, the government centralized the lottery granting process, subjecting grants to the whims of Conservative MLAs — MLAs who until 2006 handed out the money as if it were their own, on giant cheques emblazoned with their personal signature.

## **Reform the Public Affairs Bureau**

Reporting directly to the Premier’s office, the Public Affairs Bureau manages government communications, shaping the government’s message and image. It is, in effect, a public relations arm of the PC party, using millions of taxpayer dollars to promote the agenda of only that particular party and to deflect criticism of the government. Through the Public Affairs Bureau, the government has spent millions of dollars to attack the Canadian Wheat Board and the Kyoto accord and to promote private health care.

An Alberta Liberal government would replace the PAB with a non-political organization. We would also restrict the political communications work of MLAs, Cabinet Ministers and the Premier to their immediate staff.