



This document provides a summary of what we've heard to date from Albertans about how to improve our political system. It is intended to be a living document that will grow and change as we hear more from Albertans about what they expect from their

government. Turn to the last page for ways to provide your feedback, so you can help us continue to strengthen the scope and quality of our policies and our understanding of what Albertans want from their government.

OUR VISION FOR DEMOCRATIC RENEWAL IN ALBERTA

Albertans care deeply about democracy and government accountability. Sadly, for too long now, governing parties have been moving away from the fundamental principles of good government, choosing instead to focus on remaining in power. Albertans want to breathe new life into our province's democratic system.

The Alberta Party envisions a system of government in which Albertans are meaningfully engaged in an open, transparent and citizen-centred democracy. We've identified four priority areas, and have included several common sense and tangible actions that can be taken to realize this vision.

OUR 4 PRIORITIES

1. COLLABORATIVE DECISION-MAKING

The Alberta Party believes in working in partnership with businesses, communities and individuals to determine the direction of government. We need to develop policies collaboratively and make it easier for people to participate, so that those policies lead to a strong, vital and economically successful province now and for future generations. Albertans are no longer content to be “consulted” ineffectively when a proposed government action is nearly complete: they want to be actively engaged and involved in making of decisions that will affect them, their families and their province.

The Alberta Party will work hard to ensure that a suitable period of time is allotted for input and discussion and that Albertans, both those who agree with our policy direction and those who disagree, have a meaningful opportunity to participate before decisions are made. We will listen to feedback about those decisions, and will be open to changing direction when it is the expressed will of Alberta’s citizens.

The Alberta Party will:

- Develop budgets through an open process, soliciting input from Albertans before budgets are finalized.
- Make non-confidential information more easily accessible to the public through an “open data” framework
- Create a Citizen Affairs Centre that reaches out to Albertans, and simplifies the process through which citizens can provide feedback to the government.
- Shift government communications from selling party policy to providing well-balanced information. This will mean dismantling the Public Affairs Bureau - a heavily politicized communications group - and redistributing its resources among departments and MLAs to ensure a variety of perspectives are available to Albertans.
- Direct the provincial ombudsman to actively seek input on government performance from all corners of the province, instead of simply responding to complaints.

An Alberta Party Government will be an open government which is committed to making it easy for all Albertans to contribute to building this great province.

2. DECENTRALIZING POWER

The government has lost its way when it comes to listening to its bosses, the citizens of Alberta. Currently, the government’s direction is set by a small group of highly partisan people in the Premier’s Office. A strong democracy means decentralizing this power and spreading it among MLAs, so that they may better represent their constituents first and spend less time following the party line. Decentralizing power will also mean redefining the province’s relationship with its municipalities, as laid out in our Municipal Affairs Policy brief.

The Alberta Party will:

- Legislate a ‘Guideline for MLAs’ that encourages stronger engagement with constituents, resulting in a more authentic representation of their views in the Legislature.
- Increase the number of free votes within the Legislature so decisions better reflect what MLAs are hearing from their constituents.
- Place a ten-year limit on the Premier’s term in office, to ensure regular renewal within the government.
- Legislate fixed election dates in order to reduce uncertainty in the Legislature, Alberta Public Service and all organizations that work with the government.
- Increase both the resources and the independence of the officers of the Legislature, including the Auditor General, Privacy Commissioner, Ethics Commissioner, Chief Elector Officers, Provincial Ombudsman, and the new Health Auditor, whose position we have proposed in our Health Policy Brief.
- Develop whistleblower legislation for the protection of employees, so that in the event that they disclose the existence of illegal, unsafe or unethical practices in their workplace, they will be protected from retaliation on the part of their private or public sector employers.
- Use an open and transparent process for the selection and appointment of members to boards, committees, councils and agencies.

Bringing decision-making closer to the people is a critical part of our approach. MLAs should be citizens’ voice to government, not government’s voice to us.

3. WORKING FOR CITIZENS

Alberta's MLAs need to refocus on the fundamental principle that, in a democracy elected representatives work for citizens, not for party operatives, political contributors or themselves. The Alberta Party believes this will be best achieved by reducing the influence of money and favouritism in government.

Alberta has some of the highest donation limits in the country, 7 to 10 times higher than other provinces, and does not require the disclosure of donations until after the election is over. Voters have the right to know how their candidates are being funded and financially influenced prior to voting day. Leading jurisdictions are now requiring 'real-time' disclosure of political donations to ensure voters have this type of information available in a timely manner. It is time Alberta followed suit.

The Alberta Party will:

- Lengthen and strengthen the 'cooling off' periods for former MLAs and senior government officials during which they are not able to lobby government on behalf of private interests.
- Lower the limits for donations to political parties and candidates in order to reduce real and perceived influence donors have on parties.
- Set limits on candidate and political party election spending in order to reduce the influence of money on elections.
- Mandate the full disclosure of donations before elections and party leadership votes so voters have the opportunity to know how their candidates are being funded.
- Eliminate the provincial tax exemption that MLAs receive on their salaries in order to: increase the transparency of how much MLAs get paid, remove a tax benefit that is no longer required and not available to regular Albertans.
- Create an independent committee to set the salaries of MLAs by acting on independent and expert advice. Any salary increases would not come into effect until the following election.

Ensuring that Albertans are fully aware of the financial support that candidates and parties receive is an important step towards creating a democratic environment where MLAs serve Albertans & their constituents first.

4. BETTER ENGAGEMENT, BETTER ELECTIONS

In Alberta's last few elections, voter turnout has significantly decreased. It was at a record low in the 2008 provincial election at a paltry 41%. The Alberta Party believes that there are sensible and effective ways to encourage voter participation. We believe that these solutions are the first steps in encouraging a stronger voter turnout and to addressing the culture of disengagement that has grown throughout the province.

This disengagement is also reflected in the limited range of contenders who run for elected office. As a province, we must become better at attracting a broader spectrum of Albertans to run for elected office, particularly women, people of different cultural backgrounds, Aboriginal and First Nations peoples, people with young families, low-income Albertans, youth, and people with a limited ability to spend time away from home.

The Alberta Party will:

- Engage citizens in the electoral process by promoting participation from a young age, through meaningful ongoing civic education throughout their time in the school system, as well as encouraging frequent engagement and creating youth leadership roles within government and political structures.
- Modernize the electoral process by taking out the obstacles to voting. The Alberta Party will put voting stations in places where Albertans already gather (ie, shopping malls, post-secondary schools and large employment centres) and will investigate opportunities for electronic voting.
- Enable MLAs to work locally and with their provincial colleagues at the same time through the use of new technologies and increased flexibility in how the legislature operates. This would make it easier for a broader group of people to become more actively involved in government and require less time away from home for MLAs outside of Edmonton.
- Spearhead initiatives that attract a wider range of candidates reflecting the new Alberta and ensure the Legislature considers the needs of MLAs with younger families.

Making it easier for Albertans to participate in elections, both through voting and standing for election as a candidate is another piece of building a healthy democracy.



CONCLUSION

More than just a buzzword, the concept of “democratic renewal” is becoming increasingly important both in Canada and around the world. As democracies continue to redefine themselves in the 21st century, more and more citizens are demanding increased government accountability, modern election systems and regulation, and most importantly, stronger and more meaningful civic engagement. Albertans are no exception. The Alberta Party believes that, together, we can create an accountable, transparent and citizen-centred provincial government that meets the needs of Albertans.

THANKS TO

The Alberta Party volunteers who helped to put this document together, and the thousands of Albertans who participated in Big Listens providing direction, ideas, and inspiration.

FEEDBACK

We are always looking for feedback on Alberta Party policy. If you have any comments or questions, we would love to receive them. Feedback for the Democratic Renewal Policy can be given on our website (www.albertaparty.ca), our Facebook page (facebook.com/albertaparty), or by emailing us at: democratic.renewal@albertaparty.ca.



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alberta party
common ground. common sense.

