

Alberta Liberal Party

Policies Passed at the 2013 September Policy General Meeting

2013 Policies

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Forward

Policy in the Alberta Liberal Party form the core of our message as a party, a springboard for our caucus in the legislature to champion, and are the skeleton that forms the party platform every election.

In the 2012 election more than 95% of the platform was crafted from member-supported and member-passed policies from Policies General Meetings just like this. These policies have all been passed by our membership and form the core of the values that this party seeks to showcase to the province and to Canada as a whole.

The Alberta Liberals believe that we must champion our strong values in government. We are fiscally-prudent party, a party that proudly supports socially progressive change, and that cares deeply about our stewardship of the environment. It is our duty to run effective and efficient governments, that respect the autonomy of the individual, and that safeguards the environment.

These policies, and these underlying values, will always form the core of the platform come the next provincial election.

As an aside, the policy process is volunteer lead, volunteer driven, and volunteer coordinated. If you spot an error in this document please feel free to send an email to our office at office@albertaliberal.com.

Mental Health

WHEREAS there's no health without mental health;

WHEREAS in the history of provincial politics in Alberta, no provincial political party has mandated improving the care and treatment of the mentally ill as an urgent, long-overdue commitment to our most vulnerable citizens;

WHEREAS equality of opportunity for a life of dignity is a core value of the ALP, yet the current ALP policy on health care does not include a detailed proposal for an efficient, effective model of health care delivery for the mentally ill;

WHEREAS the prevalence for mental health disorders in Alberta is estimated at 20% of the general population, and represents an ever increasing portion of the relative burden of general health disorders;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED to empower the leader and executive of the Alberta Liberal Party to make every reasonable effort to advance a bold initiative to:

1. Implement and expand on the recommendations of the Senate Committee Report (2006) and "Positive Futures – Optimizing Mental Health for Alberta's Children & Youth" (2006),
2. Fund the necessary resources to promote public awareness and understanding of mental illness and improve access to and evidence-based treatment from multidisciplinary teams of both traditional and alternative health professionals in institutions and community treatment centers in order to be able to treat individuals in a holistic manner encompassing mental and physical components concurrently.

Seniors Long Term Care

WHEREAS the province has failed to bring in adequate standards of care for seniors assisted living and long term care facilities;

AND WHEREAS the province has eliminated the level of care that was provided through “Auxiliary Hospitals”;

AND WHEREAS medical professionals advise that there is a need for facilities that have special expertise in the handling of long-term care needs;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT we support the restoration of adequately, and appropriately staffed facilities that would specialize in long term care needs, and provide an alternative to the acute care hospitals that are the only medium of seniors’ care currently.” This may involve developing and restoring auxiliary hospitals.

Childhood Intervention in Mental Health

WHEREAS the prevalence of mental health disorders in Alberta is estimated at 20% of the general population;

AND WHEREAS 70% of adults with mental illness had recognizable signs in childhood that were inadequately assessed and treated, which led to serious symptoms and disorders in adolescence and adulthood;

WHEREAS failure to provide resources for childhood prevention, assessment, and treatment often leads to insufficient basic living and employment skills and inadequate housing or homelessness that cause incalculable human suffering and lost productivity;

AND WHEREAS a failure to effectively intervene in childhood eventually costs governments more for Emergency Medical Services, police services, addiction centers, and correctional institutions;

AND WHEREAS families are unduly burdened and under qualified to provide assistance for their mentally troubled children;

AND WHEREAS funding resources for the recognition, assessment, and treatment of mental health problems in early childhood is woefully lacking across Alberta, yet such resources offer the most caring, cost-efficient means to address mental health problems and allow those afflicted to live with dignity and respect;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Alberta Liberal Party advances advocates a bold initiative for a multidisciplinary, holistic, and evidence-based approach to prevention, early assessment and treatment of childhood mental health problems throughout Alberta in order to be able to treat individuals and families in a holistic manner encompassing mental and physical components concurrently.

Senior Care

WHEREAS Alberta Health Services, the care giving agency of the Government of Alberta, has had a practice to clear acute care beds by arbitrarily placing Alberta Seniors who are awaiting continuing care placement into an available facility that is within 100 kilometres of their homes;

AND WHEREAS this arbitrary placement practice negates the listing of options that seniors and their families compiled as they considered care facilities within a reasonable range of their homes;

AND WHEREAS this practice of a long distance separation is detrimental to the wellbeing of the seniors in that they are removed from their spouse, extended family and friends; lose out on the opportunities for families to have frequent visits and regular conferences with administrators and professional care providers because of distance, weather conditions, hours of travel time and the increasing cost of fuel;

AND WHEREAS this decreased contact with loved ones contributes to the isolation and loneliness of seniors who have great difficulty, coping in distant, unfamiliar locations;

AND WHEREAS the social wellbeing of people in care is critical for maintaining good physical and mental health, not only for the residents, but also for the staff striving to care for distressed residents;

AND WHEREAS depriving our seniors of a healthful and familiar locale is also injurious to the mental health of the extended family;

AND WHEREAS 100 kilometres of separation contribute to depression, divorce and even death by distance;

AND WHEREAS it was announced in June 2013, that this policy has been rescinded, and yet still remains as standard operating procedure continuing a practice that was begun in the 1980s.

THEREFORE, be it resolved that the Alberta Liberal Party is advocating the elimination of this practice to safeguard the emotional and social health of our seniors and their families.

Coal Power

WHEREAS Alberta burns more coal for electricity than the rest of the country combined;

AND WHEREAS in 2012, according to the Pembina Institute, 64 percent of the province's electricity was produced through the burning of coal;

AND WHEREAS burning coal produces more pollutants and the high Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions that pose serious health risks, and have major implications for climate change;

AND WHEREAS That calculations based on the Canadian Medical Association models for coal-related health costs Alberta spends nearly \$300 million annually on asthma, chronic lung disease and related heart disease;

AND WHEREAS There are alternatives to coal-fired electricity including transitioning with natural gas along with new firm percent goal commitments to renewable energy and energy conservation measures;

AND WHEREAS given that the provincial government has agreed to extend the operating life of the oldest coal-fired plants by 5-10 years from their contracted deadline;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that an Alberta Liberal government would work actively with the electricity industry and other generators and move to decommission the oldest plants as quickly as possible and through any legal means possible;

AND THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that an Alberta Liberal government would develop a strategy to transition to renewable energy, including through effective public policy enabling greater investments in renewable energy.

Support for Experimental Lakes

WHEREAS climate change, increasing populations and increasing development put ever-greater strains on freshwater lakes in Alberta and around the world;

AND WHEREAS the Experimental Lakes Area in Northern Ontario is a unique research facility that has provided solid solutions to threats to lake environments and scientists from around the world have stated that research that can only be done at the Experimental Lakes Area will likely be needed to maintain the well-being of freshwater lakes and those who depend on them;

AND WHEREAS the federal government has declared the work of scientists at the Experimental Lakes Area not in its plan for the Department of Fisheries and Oceans mandate current XXXX, and the governments of Manitoba and Ontario have offered only limited support for the area;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Liberal Party of Alberta supports and would fund continuing research at the Experimental Lakes Area.

Protection of Water and Related Ecosystems

Whereas quality and quantity of water in rivers and lakes depends on the integrity of headwaters ecosystems, particularly of forests on the eastern slopes of the Rockies, but also of wetlands and riparian zones,

And whereas development for various purposes, use of water and discharge of pollutants can have adverse effects on the quality and quantity of water,

And whereas the Government of Alberta is inclined to give all stakeholder groups equal standing in developing water policy,

Therefore be it resolved that the Alberta Liberal Party supports protection and enhancement of water quality and quantity in rivers and lakes by considering allowing withdrawals and returns to rivers, lakes and groundwaters

Responsible Stewardship of Energy Resources

WHEREAS energy development remains the driver of the Alberta economy, creating jobs and opportunities across the province;

AND WHEREAS Alberta seeks to remain a responsible, attractive international global partner;

AND WHEREAS energy development is not without costs, placing pressure on the environment and creating risks to the safety and health of people and communities;

AND WHEREAS responsible, transparent policy seeks an appropriate balance between economic objectives, environmental protections and the assurance of public health and safety;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Alberta Liberal Party supports more active, results-based enforcement and oversight of energy related exploration, production, transportation, processing, abandonment, and reclamation processes, including but not limited to the adoption of: (1) more stringent and enforceable environmental regulations (particularly with regard to groundwater, air quality and land conservation.

(2) increased and transparent inspections, including (a) a more robust and deliberate system of unannounced inspections and (b) the increased adoption of remote monitoring technology.

(3) reformed reporting procedures including (a) decreased industrial self-reporting and (b) open, timely, transparent public reporting by empowered monitoring agencies.

(4) a more robust response to violation, including the appropriate use of prosecution and increased fines and penalties for violators.

(5) an approach that appropriately puts a price on pollution.

(6) increased public consultation in energy policy development.

Support for Basic Research and Independent Universities

WHEREAS the Alberta Liberal Party believes in the value of basic scientific research;

AND WHEREAS governments and markets should perform the functions for which each is best suited;

AND WHEREAS there is no incentive for the free market to fund basic science research due to a lack of guaranteed immediate commercial gain and due to the importance of cooperation and information sharing in science;

AND WHEREAS applied research with commercial benefit will be done by private companies;

AND WHEREAS the Alberta Liberal Party believes that strong, independent post-secondary institutions are important for society;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Alberta Liberal Party will not dictate university research, or require post-secondary institutions to direct resources or funding towards applied research any more than they are inclined to do so;

AND THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Alberta Liberal Party will ensure that post-secondary institutions receive sufficient government funding to allow for free and unfettered research in a diversity of topics.

Tuition

WHEREAS the Alberta Liberal Party firmly believes that no student should ever be denied the opportunity to pursue a postsecondary education because of their inability to pay;

WHEREAS the average amount of student debt is now at unpatrolled levels than ever before, with the average amount of student debt being \$25,000 leaving university, and that this is unforgivable;

WHEREAS institutions like the University of Calgary are engines of the economy, where for every dollar spent on education the surrounding Calgary area receives \$12.90 of economic benefit;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Alberta Liberal Party would cut tuition across the province by one third and adopt the principle that grant-based financial aid to Alberta students is superior to our current over-reliance on debt-finance for individuals' education;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT the Alberta Liberal Party would bar universities from implementing and utilizing Market Modifiers and Mandatory Non-Instructional Fees;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT the Alberta Liberal Party would make it so that all fee and tuition fee increases would fall under the inflation-based cap in the tuition fee regulations and secure these rules in legislation;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT the Alberta Liberal Party would create a one-time capital funding package delivered to universities over a period of years on an equitable basis to remedy the historically accumulated liability;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT the Alberta Liberal Party will protect and enforce the six sector model of post-secondary education;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT the Alberta Liberal Party will create long-term, sustainable operating funding for our post-secondary sector, predictably funding success and allowing every institution to plan for the future.

Cut Subsidies to Private Schools

WHEREAS public education is a foundation of a fair society and a healthy economy;

AND WHEREAS the Alberta Liberal Party supports the use of public money for public institutions;

AND WHEREAS the Alberta Liberal Party supports inclusive and diverse public education;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the allocation to accredited, funded private schools be reduced to zero over the next five years;

AND THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that current accredited, funded private schools be afforded the option of being incorporated into the public system.

Ending Cannabis Prohibition

WHEREAS the prohibition of cannabis has resulted in enormous social and economic costs to the Province of Alberta;

AND WHEREAS the black market created by cannabis prohibition profits and supports the growth of criminal organizations, which in turn results in greater violence, and crimes of a serious nature;

AND WHEREAS the enforcement of cannabis prohibition diverts limited police resources away from activities that serve to make Albertans safer;

AND WHEREAS there is no correlation between prohibition and cannabis usage rates and there is reliable evidence to suggest prohibition has actually made cannabis more readily available to minors;

AND WHEREAS the health of effects of cannabis and rates of dependency have been shown to be minimal, especially in comparison to similar legal substances such as alcohol or tobacco;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Alberta Liberal Party will advocate for the end of cannabis prohibition, the legalization of cannabis and the ability to regulate its sale, use and production in Alberta;

AND THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED the Alberta Liberal Party supports not providing resources to enforce cannabis laws in cases of small amounts of possession;

AND THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Alberta Liberal Party supports fines for public use of cannabis and cannabis derivatives and public intoxication by cannabis in line with those issued for public alcohol consumption.

Stable and Sufficient Funding for Legal Aid

WHEREAS access to justice is necessary to protect fundamental rights that in turn are fundamental to meaningful participation in civil society;

AND WHEREAS current levels of funding for Legal Aid Alberta are insufficient to guarantee sufficient access to justice for all;

AND WHEREAS the funding scheme in place results in unstable funding to Legal Aid Alberta, often resulting in lower funding when it is needed the most;

AND WHEREAS greater rates of self-representation caused by insufficient Legal Aid funding result in significantly rates of trial and greater strain on our limited legal resources such as crown attorneys, judges and court space;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Alberta Liberal Party supports a significant increase in Funding to Legal Aid Alberta to be determined by in-depth consultation with relevant stakeholders;

AND THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Alberta Liberal Party also supports ensuring that Legal Aid Alberta's funding is both more stable, sustainable, and more responsive to societal demands, including a review of income level qualification requirements.

Drug Treatment and Mental Health Courts

WHEREAS persons with serious mental illness and substance abuse disorders are arrested at disproportionately higher rates than other Albertans;

AND WHEREAS our jails and remand centers have become de facto mental health and substance abuse treatment facilities and persons with these disabilities are significantly overrepresented in the criminal justice system;

AND WHEREAS as a result of the lack of support and treatment, many persons with mental illness and substance abuse disorders become caught in a “revolving door”, often resulting in costly hospitalization and incarceration;

AND WHEREAS justice involved persons with mental illnesses or substance abuse disorders are often unable to comply with traditional court requirements, voluntary treatment expectations, or probation/pretrial conditions and are subsequently returned to custody;

AND WHEREAS Mental Health Courts and Drug Courts can appropriately assess and assign justice involved persons with mental illnesses or substance abuse disorders to the appropriate court setting and can increase treatment participation and compliance with community supervision requirements;

AND WHEREAS Mental Health Courts and Drug Courts have demonstrated the ability to hold offenders accountable for their criminal behavior, while restoring them to greater independence and recovery, as well as pro-social community membership;

AND WHEREAS Mental Health Courts and Drug Courts have demonstrated positive cost-benefits for tax-payers, reduced future victimization, conserved public resources, and promoted public safety through significant reduction in criminal recidivism:

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT:

1. The Alberta Liberal Party commit to the expansion of Drug Courts and creation of Mental Health Courts adhering to evidence-based practices of problem-solving courts to effectively meet the needs of those offenders with serious mental illnesses and substance abuse disorders.
2. The Alberta Liberal Party support efforts to ensure ongoing funding to the Calgary Drug Treatment Court and the Edmonton Drug Treatment & Community Restoration Court and sufficient funding provided to prevention, assessment and treatment to supplement these courts.

Protecting Gender Identity and Gender Expression

WHEREAS an individual's gender is a vital component of personal identity, mental health, and overall well-being;

AND WHEREAS transgender, transsexual, and gender nonconforming Albertans deserve the full protection of the law;

AND WHEREAS these members of our community continue to face discrimination in the workplace, in the marketplace, and from public institutions;

AND WHEREAS one's dignity, livelihood, and necessities of life should never be denied or diminished on the basis of another person's prejudice, ignorance, or arbitrary judgement;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Alberta Liberal Party supports amending the Alberta Human Rights Act to include gender identity and gender expression as prohibited grounds of discrimination.

Per Capita Distribution of Municipal Revenue

WHEREAS Alberta's economic and population bases have shifted over the last century from agricultural and rural to energy exporting and urban;

AND WHEREAS Albertans now live predominantly in a handful of larger urban centers;

AND WHEREAS a fundamental disconnect now exists between where most Albertans live and the location of major industries or commercial activities;

AND WHEREAS those larger urban centers lack the industrial and commercial tax base of many rural districts and counties with relatively sparse populations;

AND WHEREAS this severely impacts the ability of those urban centers to deliver and pay for the municipal government services and public infrastructure that their growing populations require;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Alberta Liberal Party supports the distribution of revenue from Combined Low Expenditure Assessments on a province-wide, per capita basis to each governing body, be it urban municipalities, towns, districts or counties.

Progressive Taxation

WHEREAS it is the responsibility of the government to provide essential public goods and services;

AND WHEREAS adequate, stable, and predictable funding is necessary for the development, delivery, and maintenance of public goods and services;

AND WHEREAS Overreliance on volatile resource revenue to fund capital and operational expenditures has led to the deterioration of Alberta's public goods and services, as well as substantially reduced provincial savings;

AND WHEREAS the current flat tax system neither generates sufficient revenue to cover current expenditures nor allows resource revenue to be saved for future generations;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Alberta Liberal Party supports a progressive taxation system in Alberta.

Open Government Contracts

WHEREAS there is a direct correlation between the level of government openness and transparency and the health of our democratic institutions;

AND WHEREAS the Government of Alberta currently spends millions of taxpayer dollars annually on contracts with private service providers whose compensation and other particulars are not known;

AND WHEREAS Albertans can only evaluate efficiency and value for money of government contracts only if their particulars are publicly available;

AND WHEREAS the Government of Alberta has expressed a desire to be a leader in openness and transparency;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Alberta Liberal Party supports a requirement that all government contracts over \$10,000 must be fully and immediately disclosed to the public as open data, not as a request under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act.

Fuel Excise Tax

WHEREAS Alberta spends over 2 Billion annually on the construction and maintenance of roads and Alberta municipalities spend approximately another 2 billion for a total of \$4 billion;

AND WHEREAS Alberta collects only \$760 million per year in gasoline and other fuel excise taxes;

AND WHEREAS other tax and resource revenues must consequently go towards building and maintaining roads while we short education, universities, health care, seniors care etc;

AND WHEREAS transportation exhaust is a major contributor to urban air pollution and to greenhouse gas emissions and the consumers who burn it pay nothing for the impairment of the environment;

AND WHEREAS consumers make millions of decision daily about where to live, where to work and what to do for recreation and financial signals definitely affect those decisions;

AND WHEREAS the Alberta Fuel Excise tax has not been raised in 25 years and is by far the lowest in Canada and is one of the reasons that other provinces question Alberta's environmental commitment;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the fuel excise tax should be doubled from 9¢ per liter to 18¢ per liter and the funds collected from this excise tax be allocated to the construction and maintenance of roads, public transportation and other transportation infrastructure and the level of tax on different fuels should be related to their carbon and energy content.

High Speed Rail

WHEREAS a forecast given by an Alberta Government report from 2008 estimated a ridership of nearly 6 million passengers if the province invested in a 300 MPH high speed rail line between Calgary and Edmonton by 2021, and 11 million by 2051;

WHEREAS the Edmonton-Calgary corridor has consistently been, outside of the Montreal-Toronto corridor, the most often cited case of being a prime location for high speed rail;

WHEREAS 95% of inter-provincial travel is done by automobiles according to the above cited 2008 report, with 1 in 5 of Alberta's 50 million passenger trips are along the Edmonton-Calgary corridor, making it a source of environmental harm;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT a government lead by the Alberta Liberal Party would create the legal and regulatory framework to work with industry to create a high speed rail network connecting Edmonton, Red Deer, and Calgary.