

ALBERTA LIBERAL SHADOW THRONE SPEECH 2020



The Path Forward

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**Mr. Speaker, Members of the Legislative Assembly, and fellow Albertans;
It is my pleasure to speak to you today.**

I would like to begin by recognizing that we gather today on the traditional territory of the First Nations of Treaty Six and acknowledge the Métis people of Alberta, who share a deep connection with this land. During this time of challenges in relations between Canadian Governments and Indigenous peoples, it's more important than ever to acknowledge the rights of Indigenous peoples and the injustices they have faced and continue to face to this day.

I speak to you today as our Province is at a historic crossroads. We face many economic, environmental and social challenges. While these challenges can be daunting, they also provide enormous opportunity. We have the opportunity to blaze a new path forward for our province, one that is forward-thinking yet stays true to our historical values of entrepreneurship, hard work and responsibility.



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The Alberta we can all create together is one of prosperity, compassion, and global leadership on environmental issues. An Alberta of strong public schools and public health care. An Alberta with a diverse and booming job market. An Alberta where people are free to live their lives knowing that they can weather any storm. This Alberta must be more than a dream; it must become a reality, and it must become a reality in our lifetimes.

To achieve this, government must stop looking to the next election and instead look to the future—the Alberta of 2050. This Government will think long-term. This Government will think holistically. This Government will recognize that information and education are the most valuable resources in the complex and fast-paced 21st century.

Our upcoming legislative agenda will reflect this. It will focus on five main priorities: Economic Prosperity, Fiscal Responsibility, Strong Public Services, Environmental Responsibility and Co-operative Intergovernmental Relations.

For each of these priorities, this Government will introduce legislation that will not only make life better for Albertans today, but set us on a path for our best possible tomorrow.

Economic Prosperity

Alberta's oil and gas sector has been at the heart of our economy for decades, and it will remain so for years to come. Yet Alberta must also adapt to changing global markets. Our Government's economic agenda will recognize both these facts.

Alberta's greatest economic asset has always been our workforce. The people of Alberta are hardworking, resourceful and imaginative. The displacement of thousands of Albertan workers by economic change in our province has not only been heartbreaking but economically devastating.

That is why this Government's first piece of legislation, Bill 1, will be the Employment Through Education and Training Act. This act will create a new \$80 million-per-year grant program to subsidize job training and education for out-of-work Albertans. This grant program will not only help Albertans find new employment, but will create a pool of skilled workers for employers to hire in sectors where there are labour shortages. Bill 1 will get Albertans back to work, serve the needs of employers and strengthen our economy.

Fiscal Responsibility

We cannot provide strong public services in Alberta without supporting them with a strong fiscal foundation. For too long, Alberta has been riding the resource rollercoaster while ignoring expert opinion and fiscal realities. Many of us here today will not pay the price for our inaction, but our children and grandchildren will. That is unacceptable. This is why Bill 2 will be the Revenue-Neutral Sales Tax Act.

This act will have two primary components. The first will eliminate personal income tax for most Albertans by increasing the tax-exempt income amount to \$57,250 per person or \$114,500 for couples, and lowering tax rates above that. The second will introduce an 8% harmonized sales tax with credits for low-income Albertans. Bill 2 will result in net overall taxation on Albertans remaining the same. Our government revenues will become more stable and diverse, our economy will grow by taxing

consumption rather than production, and we will generate \$1 billion in new annual revenue from out-of-province visitors. This is the intelligent, evidence-driven tax policy Alberta needs to improve our finances, support our public services and grow our economy.

Strong Public Services

Albertans recognize that both a strong free-market economy and strong public services are critical to our success. Among these public services, none are more important than education and health care.

Education is the foundation of our economy and our future. Yet for 20 years, Alberta has failed to meet its own classroom size guidelines despite smaller class sizes being directly linked to improved outcomes. This Government will be changing that by introducing Bill 3, the Small Class Sizes Act.

Bill 3 will transform class size guidelines into flexible class size caps. This Government and future governments will be required to adequately fund education to meet these class size caps by hiring the teachers our students need. Teachers are not an expense. They are an investment. This increased funding for reduced class sizes will be strengthened with additional funding for true inclusive education. The classroom must be welcoming and accessible to all, including our children with special needs and other challenges.

In the spring, this Government will table a budget that puts a renewed importance on preventative, primary and mental health care. It is no secret that the cost of health care has been rising and will continue to rise. As the baby boomer generation ages, these costs will dramatically increase.

Albertans do not have to choose between massive tax increases or devastating budget cuts. We can be smarter with our health care. By investing in prevention and fundamental primary and mental health, we can drive down long-term costs. A modern health care system requires a holistic and comprehensive approach to be efficient and affordable.

In delivering strong public services, we will not cut corners. While we must spend wisely, we will not slash and burn today, only to pay a greater price tomorrow. Nor will we poison relations with our educators, health care professionals and public servants by engaging in disreputable and disrespectful conduct. This Government will not make unilateral decisions. We will negotiate with the financial interests of all Albertans in mind, while being fair to those that serve in our public sector.

Environmental Responsibility

Alberta does not need to choose between a strong economy and strong environmental protection. In fact, each depends on the other. This Government is committed to ensuring Alberta is not just the economic engine of Canada, but its environmental leader as well. We will send a message to the rest of Canada and the international community that a better way is possible.

Bill 4, the Living Sustainably Act, will legislate the elimination of most single-use plastics in Alberta by 2023 and implement Extended Producer Responsibility on select products. Bill 4 will lead to a more environmentally-sustainable Alberta—one that preserves our natural habitats and biodiversity and reduces waste. We will also begin the process to protect 25% of Alberta’s wilderness by 2025 and 30% by 2030.

Of both environmental and fiscal concern to Albertans are oil and gas sector liabilities. Estimates put these liabilities at anywhere between \$58 to \$260 billion—with only \$1.6 billion saved to cover these costs. This is a potential fiscal and environmental disaster for Alberta. That is why we will introduce Bill 5, the Oil & Gas Liabilities Reclamation Act.

Bill 5 will take preemptive action to address this risk to Albertans by creating a “Clean-Up Bond” to ensure polluters pay. This Bill will also put time limits on “suspended wells” to ensure non-producing wells aren’t left unreclaimed for decades. Both these actions are critical to protect our environment and taxpayers and ensure the sustainability of our energy industry.

Co-operative Intergovernmental Relations

This Government is proudly Albertan and proudly Canadian. We will seek a co-operative and respectful relationship with our federal counterparts. We will stand up forcefully for Alberta’s interests without building a firewall around Alberta or fanning the flames of dangerous and destructive separatist sentiment.

Our constructive approach to intergovernmental relations will extend to our relationship with municipalities and First Nations as well. This Government will replace chest-puffing with dialogue and paternalism with respectful partnership.

To live up to this promise, Bill 6 will be the Municipal Charters Act. Bill 6 will not only restore city charters but strengthen them. They will recognize municipal governments as valued independent governments and empower them with limited new taxation powers.

This Government believes in decentralizing control. We trust local governments and the citizens who elect them to understand their unique and particular needs and to govern accordingly. They do not need the Alberta Government micromanaging their affairs.

Our relationship with First Nations is critical to our future. We will build a partnership with First Nations Governments and the Federal Government to ensure equitable access to strong public services for Indigenous peoples on- and off-reserve, First Nations control over Indigenous child and family services, and resource revenue-sharing agreements.

In Closing

This Government envisions Alberta as a beacon of prosperity, progress and hope. A place that not only retains our best and brightest, but attracts them from around the world. Alberta is a province where no matter your background or skills, you can build a life for yourself and your family. This Government seeks to build on and strengthen that legacy.

The legislative agenda outlined today will root Alberta's prosperity in its people. It will secure our future by protecting our environment and stabilizing our finances. It will strengthen Alberta by building constructive relationships with others, not tearing those relationships down.

Most importantly, it will put people first.

We are a province of many individuals pursuing many goals, but we are all unified in our love of our province and a desire for a brighter future. Together, we will build on our success and ensure the fruits of that success are enjoyed by all—today, tomorrow, and into the future.



**Alberta Liberal Leader –
David Khan**

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