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## **Ban on corporate, union donations to parties only a start** Comprehensive reform needed to take money out of Alberta politics

Edmonton – While the promise to ban corporate and union donations to political parties is a positive step in making much-needed changes to Alberta’s political finance laws, more comprehensive reform is necessary to remove the longstanding influence of money in provincial politics, according to a new fact sheet released today by the Parkland Institute.

A ban on such donations is widely expected to be one of the new government’s first pieces of legislation, but “Ending Pay to Play: The Need for Political Finance Reform in Alberta” argues for a complete overhaul of the rules governing how our political parties are funded and how much they can spend.

“There’s no question that passing legislation which limits political party support to individual Albertans would make a huge difference in addressing the corrosive influence of big money in Alberta politics,” says Parkland Research Manager Barret Weber, who authored the fact sheet. “But unless the new government also significantly lowers the amount that individuals are able to donate to parties and introduces spending limits for campaigns, the wealthiest people in the province will continue to have a disproportionate influence over our political system.”

In the 2012 election period, the latest for which Elections Alberta reporting is available, corporate donations to the PCs accounted for nearly 70% of all donations above the disclosure limit, and both the NDP and Wildrose received around 40% of their larger donations from corporations and unions. At the same time, just 4% of individual donations to the PCs were small donations under the disclosure threshold, while both the NDP and Wildrose received just over half of their support from small donors. Party disclosure to Elections Alberta for the first quarter of 2015 show a similar pattern of influence.

“Most Albertans assume that corporations, unions, and wealthy Albertans wouldn’t continue to funnel hundreds of thousands of dollars into party coffers if they weren’t seeing some benefit,” argues Weber. “This ‘pay to play’ has been a dynamic in the province for decades, and there is now a historic opportunity to level the playing field for all Albertans. It’s critical to our democracy that the government gets this right.”

The report recommends strict limits on individual donations, a complete ban on corporate and union donations, limits on party spending before and during general elections and in party leadership contests, robust disclosure rules, more effective public funding, and changes to third-party advertising rules.

The Parkland Institute is a non-partisan public policy research institute in the Faculty of Arts at the University of Alberta. The fact sheet “Ending Pay to Play: The Need for Political Finance Reform in Alberta” is available for download on Parkland’s website at [parklandinstitute.ca](http://parklandinstitute.ca).

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