
Democracy & Accountability

Strengthening Alberta's Democratic Rights



Wildrose Alliance Caucus

Get it Right!

Democracy & Accountability

Alberta has a rich and proud history of producing great men and women to champion the democratic causes of voting rights for women, senate reform, government accountability and provincial rights. Disappointingly, the PC Government has failed to show leadership on democratic issues in recent years.

Politics in our province has evolved into a process that is largely undemocratic. There are no free votes in the Legislature. Government MLAs are expected to tow the party line without question. The Premier and a small group of mostly unelected appointees make almost every decision in government. The people's elected representatives, on the other hand, generally have little if any real input into the decisions that impact the lives of those who voted for them.

This democratic deficit is compounded by a lack of transparency and accountability in government. Government documents are difficult and expensive to publicly access; Cabinet sets its salaries behind closed doors; billion dollar government contracts are awarded without tender (i.e. Bill 50); approval for infrastructure projects is often politicized; budget deficits and other important financial information is underreported (including MLA expenses); and a culture of fear and intimidation keeps potential whistleblowers from stepping forward.

Predictably, this lack of democracy and transparency has resulted in poor government policies, low voter turnout, almost universal cynicism towards elected officials and a feeling that the average Albertan has no voice or influence on issues that affect them personally.



Get it Right

Albertans deserve better. A Wildrose Government would implement the following plan to strengthen democracy and accountability in our province:

- Restore the role of elected MLAs by mandating that all votes in the Legislature and caucus be free and transparently reported to the public. Motions of non-confidence would remain an option, but would be held as separate stand-alone votes. This would allow MLAs to vote on each piece of proposed legislation based on the interests of their constituents and Albertans, rather than being forced to tow the party line.
- Implement legislation establishing the essential democratic tools of voter recall and citizen-initiated referenda. In a healthy democracy, ultimate power must reside with voters. This can only be truly achieved if there are legislated mechanisms in place that allow voters the opportunity to recall their representatives and/or initiate legislation that their representatives are unwilling to bring forward. Of course such tools should be used sparingly and without frivolity. The support thresholds for both must be high enough to ensure that only petitions with exceptionally strong grassroots support are permitted to proceed to a vote. As with all legislation, all proposed initiatives should be constitutionally sound and kept within the parameters of the provincial budget.
- Institute fixed dates for general elections, senate elections, the Budget, Legislative sessions, and the Speech from the Throne.

Did you know?

- In Alberta there is no way to remove an MLA no matter badly you are being represented. Our neighbours in British Columbia have had Recall Legislation in place for a decade.

Get it Right

- Strengthen accountability and transparency in government by passing provincial legislation that:
- Introduces whistleblower protection for all government-paid employees and professionals including health care workers.
- Provides easier and more affordable public access to Freedom of Information requests as well as to the financial information of all Crown corporations and government investments. A reverse onus of proof should be put in place mandating that before any FOIP requests are denied, the government must prove to the Privacy Commissioner that the information requested by the media or public should not be released.
- Establishes an independent Cabinet and MLA pay and benefits review process that prevents the Premier, Cabinet and MLAs from setting their own salaries.
- Strengthens the offices of the Ethics Commissioner and Auditor General.

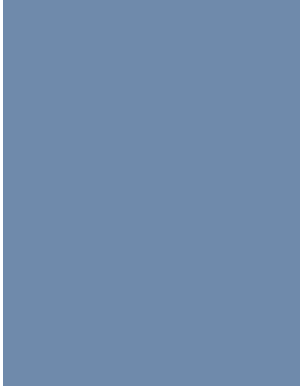
Did you know?

- In 2008 Alberta's voter turnout was a record-low 41%. No provincial election in the last 50 years has had a worse turnout. Citizens need to be re-engaged.
- The multi-million dollar contracts awarded to Alta Link to build power lines under Bill 50-Electric Statutes Amendment Act were not publicly tendered.

Get it Right

- Creates budget transparency guidelines to ensure government debts and cash deficits are reported accurately.
- Mandates public disclosure of the Government's priority list and rationale for all infrastructure projects and maintenance.
- Ensures all MLA expenses are publicly posted online.
- Guarantees an open tendering and bidding process on all major government sanctioned and approved procurement and contracts.
- Elevates the important role of opposition parties and the Albertans they represent by increasing opposition research and communications funding, strengthening all opposition parties' role in ensuring government accountability, providing opposition and government private members increased opportunities to propose legislative amendments in committee, granting greater opposition access to departmental documents and briefings, and dramatically increasing the amount of time available for questioning the Premier and Ministers on their areas of stewardship.
- Overhauls the rules governing the Legislative Assembly in order to reduce partisanship, ensure fairness and impartiality to opposition parties by the Speaker's Office, and to improve decorum in the House.





For more information, please visit: www.wildrosecaucus.ca