



MEETING WITH ALBERTA LIBERAL PARTY LEADERSHIP CANDIDATE AUGUST 31, 2011

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Voting for the Liberal Party Leadership will be Sept. 5 – 10. People who have not registered to vote in the Liberal leadership race will have to vote in person and can register to vote until Sept. 6. Individuals who have registered before September 6th are welcome to vote in-person at the Edmonton announcement event or at remote voting stations in Calgary, Fort McMurray, Grande Prairie, Lethbridge, Medicine Hat and Red Deer. Voting at the Edmonton and Calgary locations will be open from 8:00 am to 4:00 pm, while other locations will be open from 10:00 am to 2:00 pm. Please be advised that members and supporters wishing to vote in person must bring ID with them to confirm their identity. In addition, any supporters who have not been confirmed with the party office as eligible voters must bring proof of identification and address according to Elections Alberta criteria.

CANDIDATE BACKGROUND AND REASONS FOR RUNNING

I am interested in change. I think that Alberta is a pretty wonderful province. Living in the place of ancient dinosaurs has made us risk-averse,

made us lazy, and less adventurous than we should be. I was originally an actor and worked in theatre and then came into not-for-profit management. You have a lot of sympathy and empathy from me for running NGO organizations that are voluntary and not-for-profit. I remember how tough that is. I am actually one of the people who know what you go through. I have tried over the years to make it easier for you, things like the Lobbyist Act. I have always been a social advocate, and I wanted to move to another area of affecting change, specifically in public policy in the province. I chose the Liberals as the best fit with my philosophy and with their willingness to let me start working right away, not stuffing envelopes for the required twenty years. I was, in fact, elected quickly and have served since. I have had a number of leadership roles and eleven portfolios so my knowledge base is very wide. I was the health care critic during the third way attempt. By building coalitions and working with coalitions, we were successful in stopping that. That introduces something about the way I work. We need to do politics differently, and I prefer to work with coalitions, either build them or join them because I have affected a lot of change, but I have never done it on my own. It has always been working with a group of other people. We change public policy when everybody works at it from the rabble-rousing people that get chained to fences or arrested, to the people who quietly write letters. Everything in between is valid in my opinion and is needed, to affect public policy change. I like working with coalitions, and they are very effective.

In the political spectrum right now people are sick to death of political positioning on the left-right spectrum. It is simply not helpful. People work on an issue-based way. When you go to a rally and you think, "Wow, these people are interested in oil sands tailings ponds." They have all come together to work on that issue. The next issue you go to might be tsunami survivors, with different people there, some of the same but a lot of other people. Then a little later you are working on something else, possibly health care, and there are people from both groups. People are clearly interested in working. They want to be involved, want to be consulted, but they want to work on an issue by issue basis. Politicians need to follow that and go where the people are.

I have been in finance. I am very pragmatic and fiscally ruthless and all of those things that are going to be a challenge for you folks. I have yet to hear from a group in the six months that I have been at this now that says, "Cut me back; no more money, thanks, we don't want it." Each presents an entirely rational, supported argument for why the service they are providing is a good one, why it should have support, and why it should have even more money. Wonderful, where are we going to cut? And, if we are not going to cut where is the extra money going to come from. That is about the courage of the people to support that. So one of the things that I would like to see is a process called a citizens' assembly where you bring people together from around the province to sit together as a citizens' assembly to review government revenue. The assignment needs to go to them, and they hand the assignments back to the politicians to say, "This is what we want implemented. This is what we have said." And, it does need to look at government revenue. Is income and corporate tax an appropriate way to fund the province? Should we continue to take 30% of the daily operating money of the government directly from oil and gas revenues that came out of the ground yesterday? Is that appropriate? Should we have a plan of how to deal with surplus budgets, when, and if we have them in the province? Should we have money from non-renewable resources revenue set aside in an endowment fund for certain things? Should we scrap the whole thing and have a consumption tax and develop a plan to deal with people who would be really affected by that? I think these questions need to be answered because it has been a very easy sell to tell people that lower taxes is the answer to everything. It's not. If we want an Alberta that is going to thrive and move forward into the 21st century, it is going to be about how we are going to get money. I can have an opinion but it matters not. What do you want?

So, it is about consultation to me. It is about coalitions. It is about having people actively involved in the decision making as we go along. That is where social media comes into play, and I am very excited about the possibilities of social media. That can be run on a time limited basis from just about anywhere, including off the floor of the assembly. It allows people to give input very quickly and move on to something else.

I came here to change the world. I have been successful in changing the world. There are other things on my list. I think we are a great province. I think we can be better. I think there are some innovative ways to do that. We have a number of great institutions that were established in the 1950s. They need to be ever greened. They need to be updated for the 21st century and modernized: health care, education, the relationship with the not-for-profit sector. There are a lot of them that are good institutions such as AISH, welfare, libraries. They are not keeping up and have ended up with a patchwork of funding models which is just a waste of time for administrators.

HOW WILL YOU COMMIT TO MAKING ALBERTA THE MOST INCLUSIVE PROVINCE IN CANADA?

I am actually struggling with this one a little bit. I have worked a lot on human rights and inclusion, and I always believe that when you improve something for one group you inevitably improve it for everybody. For example, putting in ramps instead of stairs for access into buildings was done for a specific group of people but many more people benefit from it, moms with kids in strollers, people with a temporary broken leg, someone with their arms full of groceries. The ramps and the access doors helped everybody. I can't think of anyone that it hurt, in other words. Making a society more inclusive makes a society better, period.

Where I am struggling with this is the education system where it doesn't seem to be working as well as we had hoped. I think society genuinely wants to see inclusion of what they call special needs children in the classroom, but the reports back from teachers are saying that it is not working. It is a hostage taking situation (my words, not theirs) in that all their time and attention is going to one or two children in the class, even when they are supported by full time aide. The rest of the children are not getting the attention of the teacher. So that is the part that I am struggling with because it is not working. How do we change that? What is possible there? Could we have shorter hours, longer hours, some training somewhere else, etc.?

When we talk about making buildings accessible, close captioning, sight impairment additions to what is going on, inclusion in the workforce, those things are not hard. They are about political will. They are about

champions who want to see that move forward. I think that one of our other really big challenges around inclusion, because people get it about mental health, they are just scared. Disabilities, they get it, and they are not scared. Somehow we got over that one for the most part. Autism, they are bewildered, and we have an increasing rate of autism, and we don't know how to do that one, as well as, say, FASD. These may not be things that you would include as members of a disability community but as I move through, I include them.

I see a real commitment from the population but I also see where it hasn't worked, but there is also a hesitation to come out and say that for fear that people would think that they were being bigoted or non-inclusionary. I don't think that that is the case, but we have to admit that in some cases it's not working.

The rest is fairly easy. In the assembly close captioning is a breeze with technology. I read ACCD's paper on health access. Again, it is not rocket science. Nothing in there was. It was all pretty simple, and it was pretty much about political will or will to do it.

HOW WILL YOU ENSURE EQUITY IN ACCESS TO DISABILITY SUPPORTS FROM CHILDHOOD TO ADULTHOOD?

I have actually dealt with this in the house. A childhood friend of mine has a son who is developmentally delayed. She was very frustrated with trying to move him from Children's Services to PDD. She came to me and told me her story. I brought her into the house; I introduced her; I asked questions of the Minister. The Minister was amazed. She had never heard of this difficulty in transitioning, that they had to reproduce all these records to prove that he was still developmentally delayed. I am a passivist but treatment like that makes me want to smack someone. There are a couple of issues in there around privacy, but we can deal with that because the people whose privacy would be invaded are the ones who are most interested in having a smoother transition from one silo to another. I am the privacy expert now out of all the MLAs. I got there by just sitting in on every committee. I am really up to date on privacy issues. People here want this to happen, and so we should be able to make it happen. That one is not an issue to me. It is about reorganizing

that and lifting the veil. I don't think it will even need legislative change. The private sector complains about red tape, but the not-for-profit sector does not get to say that this is stupid.

HOW WILL YOU ENSURE EASE OF ACCESS TO DISABILITY SUPPORTS FOR ALL DISABILITY TYPES?

I am really struck by this that we have a system for PDD, like PDD is one thing, and then there is AISH. They are two completely different programs. That doesn't make sense to me, and I am sure it doesn't make sense to you. There has got to be a way to work that through. I would have to spend a lot more time on it.

I am really interested in why we can't get back to the idea of white papers or community wide discussions on issues because, if we say that inclusion is important to us, then do we all understand that that requires funding in some shape or form. If we say that we want people with disabilities or diverse backgrounds or however else you want to do this, to be part of our society and live with dignity and respect, which you hear all the time, then why do we keep people in perpetual poverty? I don't understand that.

An easy one is to index AISH payments and the PDD budget to the Alberta weekly wage. We need to have that discussion. If society comes back and says that we don't want to fork over that much money, although I don't think they would, but we have to deal with the fact that it means more money. This brings us back to the comments I made in my opening statements. Your members are going to have to come to terms with the fact that one way or another we are going to have to put more money into the budget, and where is that going to come from? The next time people squeal about "They raised my taxes, I don't get anything for my taxes", all of your members are going to have to turn to that person and say, "Really" and start to challenge them because we are not having that discussion, and we are letting people off the hook on it.

The government wants the groups to collapse until there is only one voice because it is easier for them to say to one group, "Okay, this is what we are going to do." Coming to grips with the specialties of the various different groups requires some time and thinking. Politicians are like

radio interviewers; they bounce very quickly, wide and an inch deep. We know a lot of information, and as soon as I move on I forget what I just did. Trying to come to grips with that level of information is hard.

You have a constituency like mine, and I am blessed I have an incredible diversity of people here, many of whom struggle. I have a large population of people living on AISH because we have cheap housing stock, and downtown is where services are available. They tend to cluster close to services and cheap housing stock. Cheap housing stock, what does that tell you? It tells you there is a second tier of living, poverty, no raise. Right there the whole dignity, respect thing just goes out the window.

The fact that people are not meeting the IQ requirements for PDD funding and services is part of what I mean when I talk about updating these fifties institutions, though to be fair, these are more like seventies institutions. The concept that you will get on AISH if you can prove medically that you can never work again, just doesn't work anymore. Do we want to offer financial assistance and benefits to people who otherwise would die on the streets? Yes. The idea that we would have a government program still works but it needs to be adapted to deal with things like technology as we get better treatment and better pharmaceuticals for people with mental health issues. If it could be set up for people who could work 50% of the time, if that is all they can deal with. Monday to Friday, 8:30 to 4:30, is not happening for them. Perhaps they can work for five years and then they have a serious problem or a major change in their bodies, and they are institutionalized for six months. Do we save their jobs, their pension, what happened to their apartment and everything in it? That is what I mean by rethinking and being willing to open up those institutions and look at them again. We, as a society, really do prize those institutions, but they just don't work anymore. We are dealing with a lot of red tape and ridiculousness.

The review that took place with PDD was done with the eye of we are spending too much money, how can we make this cheaper? They took only six of the eight recommendations of the review, and one they did not take was the recommendation to go to an advisory council model instead of a regional board model. This government spends its time

looking at how to not spend money, and that is about staying in power by continually offering to keep people's taxes low and by spending the oil and gas revenue right out of the ground. I don't know how many of you would take out a mortgage on your home to go and pay off your visa card or to buy groceries. That is not a good way to do business.

WHAT DISTINGUISHES YOUR PLATFORM ON DISABILITY ISSUES FROM THE OTHER LEADERSHIP CANDIDATES?

We have thought about it, and we have worked very hard in my office to insist that everyone is treated with respect that comes into the office; everyone is listened to; everybody's story is validated, no matter how interesting it is. Everyone deserves to be listened to. Then we work from there. I will meet with any constituent who wishes to meet with me. I do have a different way of looking at this. I do believe in inclusion, but I am also willing to recognize that there have been a few bumps and bruises along the way and that we do need to update it; it's not perfect.

You are put in a defensive position every time it's going to be reviewed. No one wants the labour code opened. The unions think the government is going to go at them and strip more of the collective bargaining rights out. That is the province we live in. That is not the province Peter Lougheed started.

I would be willing to index AISH. To me, it is insulting that they haven't done it. If it is good enough for the MLAs, why isn't it good enough for AISH recipients and what is left of welfare and PDD because you cannot index AISH and not index PDD, which is the same thing but a different program. The last part of that is the minimum wage. I cannot tell you how angry I am that they have a two tiered minimum wage now, and the next time they go back there is going to be a three tiered minimum wage. You are going to be the third tier. That is just insulting, and that is not the Alberta way. I don't think Albertans view that as fair.

HOW WILL YOU ENSURE THE GOVERNMENT OF ALBERTA WORKS WITH THE ALBERTA DISABILITIES FORUM TO ACHIEVE COMMON GOALS?

You need to work with the decision makers. It helps to find champions who are interested in what you are doing, who understand what you are doing, and who are willing to bring this forward. The way we function in Alberta currently is that there is a minister that you would deal with, or several, and you definitely need to talk to them and their deputy minister and their program heads, but you also need to talk to the opposition people who are assigned to that. You could be dealing with someone who has four portfolios, or others who have twelve, but none the less, they are the people who are assigned in our system to pay attention to that. Sending it to all of us, even to me who has an interest in this, I am not the critic, and when your package comes across my desk I go, "I would love to read that," but I have to do my other work, and I take it and put it on this pile called *Really Need to Read This*, and after about two years I had to get to that sad day when I am not really going to read that pile from 2009 because I am paying attention to other work, and my job as a critic is to champion that other work, get to know it, and to get in front of the media, and to write the questions. The other thing is, and if we get another government what I am about to say won't matter, but if we have the same government, it is important not to be bullied by them, and it is easy to be bullied by them. I know it is hard, and I know what they say to you, but you do need to stand up to them and insist that you are going to work with the opposition and give the opposition the same information, and they will help you.

Sometimes that is helpful to the government. Sometimes you have a minister who is having trouble convincing their own colleagues around the table that this is an issue that is deserving. We do often work with government MLAs. Sometimes I would get up in question period and ask questions to the minister who would turn to their colleagues and say, "See, she just massacred us on that. You have got to help me on this." So you don't know what the relationship is so don't always accept that opposition is critical or hostile. I am there to get work done. If I have to put my ego in a bag and go and beg, I will do it. I have learned to do it. I sure wouldn't have done it in the first four years but I have learned to do it because I had a constituent in front of me who was falling between the cracks, and it wasn't fair. There was nothing there to help them, and I had to go and talk to a minister that I loathed and did not respect but I did it because it is not about me. It's about the constituents; it's about the people that you are representing.

The leadership of the liberal party is often about being a strong leader where you know to say, "That's enough, decision made, moving on," and sometimes it is about saying, "Okay, we are going to have to come to an agreement that we can all live with on this one." I think for the members

and the supporters of the Liberals, it is about offering hope that things could be different. There is no question that the Liberal policy is excellent and has been for every single election. The media agrees with that, people agree. The government regularly steals it, but there is no question that we have the best policy. But it is about having a leader who is charismatic, who does well with the media, which can be tricky, who respects them and works with them as professional colleagues, and respects both the work that has been done by the people who came before, and someone who can bring in new people and let them sit at the big table. None of the stuffing envelopes to be at the big table; everybody should be at the big table now, especially bringing in younger (anyone under 50) people. The mean age of people in political parties is probably 65.

Doing things the same way and expecting a different outcome is the definition of insanity. I would go with the best candidates we have and not go with trying to find someone to run in every constituency. We are a modern urban province. Concentrate on the urban ridings where two thirds of the people live and try to resource those people better and not sweat the other stuff. The rural ridings – Peter Lougheed won in Edmonton and Calgary. He did not win one rural riding the first time, but the second time all the rural ridings wanted a rural MLA, and they all jumped on. People forget that.

I am willing to try different things: go big or go home.