



# MEETING WITH PC LEADERSHIP CANDIDATE JULY 26, 2011

**Gary Mar**

## **CANDIDATE BACKGROUND AND REASONS FOR RUNNING**

Let me start by saying thank you very much for your time and the invitation. It is an opportunity for me to learn more. There are things that I know, and I know what I know, but I also know what I do not know and so you will find me to be an active listener and to be a person who will ask many questions in an effort to understand the issues better.

Having been away from Alberta for the last three and a half years, you have a much better appreciation for things at home, and you have a better appreciation when you walk in someone else's shoes, as it were.

As an example, two years ago this month, I blew out a knee, and I was in a cast from my hip to my ankle for a period of six months. I never realized how few places were accessible to people with disabilities. I was in the United States, and I would say that when we look at our building codes, for example, there has been lots of improvement. I would make the overall observation that there has been some progress made in the community for disabled people in the last several years.

My sense from going throughout the province is that there are some things that need to be looked at again. For example, during my time with

Premier Klein, he did a significant review of AISH. It might be time to review that again. Housing for the disabled is one of the issues that I have heard about in other parts of the province.

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

In terms of your question, “How would we commit to making Alberta the most inclusive place in Canada?” I would argue that many people are coming to this province because of the programs we have. We have to ensure that our programs are not only among the very best, but that they are also planned and sustainable. These are things that we need to do to ensure that we can continue to have the best access for this community in Canada. Frankly, I don’t have a monopoly on good ideas as to how that is expressed in public policy, and that’s why I say I know what I know but I also know what I don’t know.

The Premier’s Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities is one that enjoyed a good deal of attention during Premier Klein’s time. My sense is that it has lapsed somewhat in terms of support for it and that it’s been characterized as a ministry issue rather than one that has the attention of the Premier. That is something that I would like to restore because I was impressed by Premier Klein’s efforts in that regard. I was impressed with Gary McPherson who tried very hard to make this an issue during the last leadership race. Gary was a soccer coach for one of our daughters and a guy who never let his disabilities stop him from contributing greatly to our province. I admired him very, very much.

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

From my point of view supports should follow the person whether you are seventeen or twenty-one. This is particularly notable to me in the area of mental health.

When I look at some of the things on our health care horizon, a few things really loom large. One is mental health issues. When I look at the incidence rates, they are rising fairly steadily. Also, when you look at the disability community, baby boomers are coming into their later years. They don't know what kinds of problems they are going to have as they get older. It's not the same as it was. Things that we can do today that can make things easier for people as they age - looking at it from a longer perspective, not from a ten to twenty month perspective, but from a thirty to forty year perspective. There are some things that we can do today that don't cost that much money that will ease the transition as baby boomers become seniors. Their needs in the future will be different than the needs that they have today.

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

I thought about that, and I am not exactly sure what the answer is to that question. That would be one of those situations where government, in my estimation, has been doing a lot of telling but not enough listening. It strikes me that people who represent the community, who are closest to the people you represent, will actually have the best ideas as to how we can breathe life into that. I cannot tell you how I would do it because I do not know. Nevertheless, my perspective in government policy is always that some of the best ideas come from the people who know the issues the best; government does not have a monopoly on good ideas, and we have to work together. Therefore, in ensuring ease of access to supports, I do not know what the answer is and that would be one that I would be looking for your thoughts on.

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

I have not heard anybody else talk about restoring the Premier's Council, talking about a review of AISH; also, of housing. I think these are three areas that loom large, and I do not hear others even mentioning them. But for me, it's important, because, take for example, PDD, these are ninety-three hundred most fragile, if that's not an offensive word, fragile people in the province, and they need our province's help. It reflects upon our society, upon our province how these ninety-three hundred people's needs are being dealt with. When I look at the review by KPMG, for every hundred dollars that goes to people with developmental disabilities, an additional thirty-one is required to administer that, which does not strike me as being good.

I am not saying that we should spend less on persons with developmental disabilities and the administration, but I am saying that more of it has to go to front line services, and less to the back room administration and the delivery of those services. That is something that I would want to give some direction on, if I were Premier, to Minister Jablonski who has responsibility for that.

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

It would be through meetings like this. Tools for disseminating information and sending messages out broadly are better than they have ever been. We have had, for example, a forum on health care where fifty-eight hundred people from all over Alberta were on the telephone with me. All of them able to make their comments, all of them able to ask their questions. Those things are good but it never replaces the kind of dialogue that you are able to have face to face, so I would make the commitment to you that a Premier's forum on persons with disabilities would be important to me and not just delegated to a ministerial responsibility. However, I still have lots to learn in this area. I've touched

upon it in my time in health and my time in education. I can remember in education dealing with buying very expensive wheelchairs and custom made equipment so that students could be in our classrooms. From my perspective those were not in pith and substance education issues. They were health issues and so I wrote a memo to Halvar Jonson who was then Minister of Health. I said this is an area that should be dealt with under health care because it doesn't have to do with the educability of a child. After that, both Halvar and I changed portfolios. I became Health Minister so I had to answer to my own memo. I thought this was good. It was an easy one to answer. I knew what I am going to say on this. Therefore, from that point of view, I have had peripheral involvement with this community that all of you represent but I know that with the forty-two organizations, that that is very broad indeed. Some I have touched upon in my previous experience and some I have not.