



# MEETING WITH PC LEADERSHIP CANDIDATE SEPTEMBER 15, 2011

## Doug Griffiths

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

I have been an MLA for ten years and have travelled all over Alberta working on the Community Development Strategy for the province. I grew up in Coronation in rural Alberta. I was a rancher and got my honours degree in philosophy. I wrote my thesis on Ethics and the Environment, and had minors in Eastern religion and political science. I had planned to go to law school but philosophy changed me quite a bit, so I went back to the farm and worked one year and taught one course at the U of A. I realized that I loved teaching so I got my after degree in education. There I was with a perfect life; I taught all day, rode my horse in the evening, and worked on the ranch on the weekends. I spoke often on the need for community development and that is why I ran the first time. I wrote the Rural Community Development Strategy. We had some recommendations in there, particularly around transportation. It is difficult in rural Alberta for seniors and persons with disabilities to get around. In Wainwright they tried to develop an integrated transportation

strategy for those who needed it. Unfortunately, the grant they applied for from the Rural Development Fund was turned down.

They took me off community development, and I wrote a book, *Thirteen Ways to Kill Your Community*. I travelled around talking about rural development and community development.

When the Premier announced that he was retiring, I had issues that needed to be addressed so I should step up to the plate; that is why I am running. I am still running on the need for community development. I know that we are going to become a global energy super power. We have the resources; we have the skills, the know-how; we have the people to make it happen. We are going to feed the world and teach them to feed themselves. United Nations came out with a study that even as many as five countries in the world within one generation will be all that remains exporting food. The world will need us for food and to teach them how to grow their own properly.

If we focus on everything we are going to do internationally, how wonderful and amazing we are going to be and important to the rest of the world. If we lose sight of building better communities, then what are we doing it for? What good is producing and harvesting all this wealth if we are not doing it to improve the quality of life of families, community by community. Coming from rural Alberta I have seen so many communities turn into work camps. You can have health care, a job, and even access distance education, but what about all the quality of life components that make it worth living in a community from artistic endeavour to historic preservation to recreation opportunities. These are the things that bind a community together where people identify with each other. I think we have lost sight of building a better Alberta for the next generation to build better communities. We have to be more than a work camp for the world, harvesting and exporting resources, to be a little Fort McMurray for the globe. We have lost sight of what we are doing. We are supposed to build better communities. We don't have a long term picture of what we are going to do with the wealth from the oil. That is why I am doing it, and I am going to win.

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

I say the same comments when speaking of how to get youth engaged. You don't come up with solutions for youth issues by just asking what the challenges are. Let them figure it out; get them involved. You have to have their perspective at the beginning and let them own it, which is very meaningful. Some people don't realize how important that is when looking for solutions.

I can give you an overall synopsis first. I will admit to you that I don't have all the answers for dealing with the disability challenges in communities. I realize that I don't have to live with it, and I don't have the full perspective. I am a big proponent of putting those people who are experts in the field to work finding the solutions.

I was in a senior's lodge a few weeks ago, and there was an elderly gentleman who said they weren't there permanently, but they were there because his wife broke her hip, and she was using a wheelchair. He was wondering who designed the building because all the plugins were behind where the furniture goes and all the light switches are up high. I thought the building had been designed without the right perspective, so you have to include people who have the full perspective.

Rob Lougheed was a stellar advocate. I think our caucus still misses him and his advocacy. Changing the building code is the first and foremost way you can help. It improves the functionality of the spaces we have which makes it possible for people with disabilities to work in those environments. It removes another barrier to getting them involved.

I mentioned I worked in Wainwright to have some kind of integrated transportation strategy for seniors and people with disabilities in a rural setting. It is so difficult for people with disabilities to function in a place that doesn't have any services that relate to them which is why they end up moving to an urban centre where, at least, there is some type of mass transportation to help you function better.

I am not the expert to write the plan, but I am willing to help implement it if someone brings it to me. The book I wrote, *Thirteen Ways to Kill Your Community*, is about integrating; there is a section on youth; there is a section on seniors; there is a section on outsiders to the community; there is a section on immigrants. We have to realize that our strengths come from our weaknesses. We all have weaknesses, but they are also strengths if you learn to use them. Strengths also become weaknesses if you overindulge them. The community becomes stronger when they pull from those typically seen as weaker, such as the immigrants who can't speak English, the young people who don't have experience, and the old people who don't have new ideas. They all have something to bring. That is why I love EmployAbilities. That is exactly what it is about.

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

My understanding of that comes from my education background and the transition from kids up to five years old being under one program, and then there is a different program for kindergarten to grade 12, and there is a different program after you are done grade 12, and so on. The integration of these programs is pathetic. In our school district there is a young woman who uses a Braille machine. When she entered school she had already mastered her Braille machine but the school would not let her use that machine but forced her to use a different, more archaic machine. These barriers are false; they are bureaucratic and absurd.

The integration of these programs needs to be seamless. It doesn't matter if we are talking about persons with disabilities, or seniors, or young people. People don't realize how government is broken down into silos.

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

I have heard people criticize government employees but in my mind government employees are just as frustrated with red tape because they have to follow the rules all the time. I don't know why we wouldn't take some very intelligent people who work in the public sector and let them

make intelligent decisions about how to help Albertans. Those barriers, those silos, those rules, and those guidelines are there so the bureaucracy never screws up because if someone makes a mistake then we wear it as politicians and so politicians put rules around them. The 99 times out of a 100 that you are going to get better service for Albertans, it is better to have one screw up. I am willing to wear it, just to let the civil service make some intelligent decisions about what the Albertans that they are serving need. What if we kept the policies and got rid of some of the red tape, the double and triple checking?

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

I don't have a disabilities platform. It is incorporated into everything I have said about changing the way health care operates and building better communities. Rule number one is that you put the people who are experts in their field and you turn them loose to let them solve the problems. When it comes to government reform, I am not keen on government silos and bigger government. You need to break things down to focus on the community level and empower the civil servants, who are on the ground and dealing with clients, to make some intelligent decisions. That would be the fundamental elements of my disabilities platform besides the things I talked about such as building code standards that Rob Lougheed convinced me of in fifteen minutes when I first got elected nine years ago. I don't have a list of specific things because it doesn't matter if it is health care or finances or building communities. The biggest challenge is not coming up with new policy recommendations to re-engineer. It is shifting the culture that has been created in government for the last twenty years and changing it to think more community focused and to quit protecting its own turf and silos. It's the culture that needs to change. If you change the culture then you can start working on solutions.

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

You can ask any group or any individual that I have ever met with that I tell people if I am going to win I need help. I will need more help after I win to make sure we get this done right. There are going to be a lot of walls and a lot of barriers up to prevent someone like me winning, because people don't like cultural changes; they don't like to have to do things differently; they like to hold on to things the way they were, and I am not there to keep things the way they were. I am not doing this because I want to put Premier on my resume. I have a very nice resume already. I am doing this because I want a better Alberta for the next generation, and I need all the help I can get whether it is at the bureaucratic civil service level as an MLA or as organizational groups that understand the issues and need the freedom to resolve them. I am not the expert, but I know where to find the expertise.

I have a plan in place. There are three things:

- I am going to come up with a budget with a long term fiscal framework so we don't ride this rollercoaster any more.
- I am going to deal with the property rights issue which is a big issue in rural Alberta where they are worried they will have their property rights rescinded.
- I am going to recruit new people into government within the civil service. We need to break the mold and mindset of civil service that they move up the chain, and they manage and protect turf. You have to bring in new people. Just like cabinet ministers, we should bring in deputy ministers for four years who know a specific target and a goal, and manage that and get it done, and then go back to working at their day job, just like MLAs should do, so they don't become permanent managers of the bureaucracy who don't want to see things changed. That is how you break this disconnect between the politicians who want to do one thing with the civil service in between. There are some great civil servants who need to be freed up to do things like open government and allow more thinking that is creative.

Thank you!