



MEETING WITH PC LEADERSHIP CANDIDATE AUGUST 17, 2011

Alison Redford

CANDIDATE BACKGROUND AND REASONS FOR RUNNING

I am Alison Redford, MLA for Calgary-Elbow. I was Justice Minister until the middle of February when I stepped down to run as a candidate in the leadership race to be leader of the party and Premier of the province. I have found it to be a fascinating experience because this is a time in this province when people are ready to engage differently in politics if we can put the right leadership in place – leadership that understands the importance of that engagement.

I will tell you that from my perspective, my life has been about the values of bringing people together to set directions that everyone can support and that is something that I believe has been missing for a very long time in Alberta. Many amazing people in this province do amazing work. Unfortunately, one of the reasons they have had to do that work, that you have had to do that work, is because we have seen a gap in long term policy planning around many of the issues that impact people - issues around social policy such as social justice, human rights, integration of health care, and education. I am very glad to be running in this race and happy to be here today to talk to you about that.

I am forty-six years old. I am a mother. I have a nine-year-old daughter, and we live in Calgary. I grew up in Calgary but I did not move to Calgary until I was twelve years old. I lived overseas before that. I have two sisters, and I have loved my life in this province. I have spent a lot of time outside of the province working in many countries, primarily in countries that I describe as having challenges because of immediate conflicts such as South Africa, Bosnia, and Afghanistan.

What I have learned through the work that I have done is that the foundations of good community come from bringing the right people to the table to talk about how government decisions impact them. When you do not have that, you begin to see disconnect between the people and the government. Having been a Minister for three years in government and having lived in Alberta for most of my life, I think the government could do a much better job in terms of connecting with people who are actually impacted by the decisions that government is making.

I believe, we, as Albertans, have seen a lack of direction with respect to long-term policy-planning, and we are now living with the legacy of that. That is why we now have a number of government systems that continue to operate the way they operated twenty years ago when we had a smaller population and faced different challenges. We are not addressing the real needs of Albertans anymore.

It is to the point where it is difficult, even for someone in my position, to articulate in a particular sphere like this exactly what the needs of Albertans are. And that's probably just as well from the perspective that it can't be my job to do that. It's my job, as a political leader, to sit down and listen to you tell me what those needs are. I don't say that as a cop out. I do not say that as something where I feel like politicians do not need to take ownership of these issues.

In the last eight months as I have travelled around this province, I have seen tremendous people who are volunteers in their communities on a number of different issues. They understand what is going on in their communities and in the lives of people who are impacted by government decisions. These people have no ability to sit down and have a real detailed conversation with people in government, and I don't just mean

elected officials. I also mean public servants because you cannot have public servants who are able to do an effective job of consultation if they have no idea what the direction of the government is in terms of what some of these issues are.

We have to do a much better job of doing that work so that we are able as a party to rebuild trust with Albertans. Only in this way will Albertans think that the decisions that government makes can matter. We can move out of a situation where you are an advocacy group to government to where you are part of the decision-making.

At the end of the day, it is for the political leadership to set out choices for Albertans and Albertans will make that choice, but it has been many, many years in this province since we have had leadership that has been able to articulate what the choices are that Albertans might have. When I sat in Safe Communities as Justice Minister chairing the Safe Communities Secretariat, I saw some things that worked very well. What I saw was community stakeholders and some passionate public servants who wanted to come together to do long-term planning and build initiatives and articulate a vision for the future and get people working and going in the same direction. Then I saw people who've been in government for a long time doing exactly the same thing who see no other way, and I wouldn't say are resisting intentionally, but just see no other way that the world could possibly exist. So it's impossible to sit down and have conversations that take us to where we need to go.

We know that ninety percent of people coming into provincial courts on criminal charges are people who are dealing with addiction from self-medication because of undiagnosed mental illness. On the other hand, they are individuals who are falling through the cracks. In addition, we have the vulnerable youth population of kids that have no family supports and are homeless. All of these pieces come together and yet we as government have not been able to, I should not say we as government, government has not found a way to be able to integrate this so that we are actually focusing on what we want the outcomes to be.

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

Within my health care policy, I talk about continuing care, and I talk about home care as being a primary piece of that. We need to enhance home care because that's really the place where people want to be able to stay for as long as possible. So home care with respect to both people that require supports who are not seniors and people who are seniors needs to be enhanced.

I need to disabuse you of something. You keep saying they. I do not know who they is any more. Sitting and listening to a Minister of Health or Minister of Seniors and Community Supports tell you that they are going to do anything now, is starting to become an irrelevant conversation because in five weeks there will be a new Premier and there will be a new Cabinet. Whoever they were that did not get it done even though they have been talking for two and a half years about what aging in place looks like. We now have the opportunity to do something different and that is so important.

It is critical for me to be able to shift people so we can actually have a real conversation because I have listened to these announcements, and I have listened to the announcements with respect to building more facilities, but nothing is happening. In fact, we are seeing exactly the opposite happen right now in terms of aging in place and creating facilities and allowing people to age in place because we have very little new announcements with respect to long-term care even as it relates to seniors. In addition, we have Alberta Health Services creating a new category of supports that will dictate entirely different service delivery models for people who are living in facilities.

We are seeing again inconsistency between government departments whether it is Seniors and Community Supports both in terms of the work that you do and seniors work but also in terms of where Alberta Health Services is coming in to actually talk about how these work together to provide services to people. It is entirely possible to do it but we do not have a mechanism in place to do it yet. We can say that we haven't yet fallen backwards on that but we could have made a lot more progress if we were talking about dealing with facilities and services at the same time and so that becomes what a new policy direction needs to look like.

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

The stress that families are under is just awful. Some people that I have talked to in Calgary have told me that even before their children entered school they could manage with the supports that were available and actually said that for their needs they were good supports but as soon as children enter the school system, families could hardly cope anymore because the supports have changed. It just does not make sense why this is happening.

In addition, I would like to talk to you about continuing care for a generation of people who are probably going to need some supports and right now they are being warehoused in long-term care facilities that do not give them a quality of life. We have to begin to think about what that means in terms of how we treat people with dignity and respect, how they can continue to be relevant, and how citizens are engaged and connected to the best of their abilities. We do not seem to understand that what is needed is integrated thinking. One of the reasons is when you get a certain group of people who are sitting around the cabinet table talking about these issues; the first thing they see is dollar signs. They do not even think about the outcomes without a dollar figure attached to it.

I do not know how much detail you want. I will tell you I will fund it. I could sit and tell you blow-by-blow about what is going to happen at treasury board - where I am going to take the money from, what the priorities are going to be, and how we are going to make sure that we are making the programs that you are dealing with fit with education and health.

When I talk about long term sustainable funding in education or long term sustainable funding in health care I don't have advocates for those issues saying to me, "How are you going to fund it?" They just say ok you've made a commitment. I know you're asking me that question because that's been your experience. You have people who say we're going to fund it.

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

I believe that this is a province that needs to have a social policy framework around what we want the future of our community to look like. We need to be integrating our work around health care, education, and community supports to ensure that we're actually dealing with what will come next in the future.

We have dealt with too many of these issues in isolation, and we have not had the right people at the table. In five weeks, there is going to be a new Premier and in five weeks, I want you to be able to tell me how we are going to work together to try to make this better.

I have talked in my policies already with respect to full day kindergarten and subsidized childcare spaces that need to be in place. You cannot allow families to undergo stressful experiences because of the way that it impacts both the parents and the children in the long term. There is no reason in this province that we are still now talking about these issues except that there is an ideological perspective that government does not need to be involved in them and that is wrong. It is simply wrong and so if you begin to change those values about what we expect our communities to look like then we can begin to make those changes.

This is not about whether there is enough money. This is about whether or not we think it is a priority. The only way to get that understanding is to bring different people to the table to talk about whether or not the way we are delivering these programs is the right way to do it. I do not think that it is. It is honestly from my perspective collapsing, and we are not investing where we need to invest. This sector should never be a sector that is feeling vulnerable because of the ups or downs of our non-renewable resource revenue. As a government, there is no reason we cannot manage these programs within our existing revenue. It's simply a matter of how we budget and what long term sustainable planning looks like. When you have a long term policy, when you've done the work on a long term policy and then you commit to sustainable funding and you understand how these pieces come together, then you know with certainty where you are going.

The people who work in your agencies will know where you are going. Your clients will know where you are going. Albertans will understand that, and we're not going to then have to have the economic arguments with ministers about how this saves money ten years from now because we put in place the plan that is clear enough that we all understand why we're doing it, what we're doing, and where we're going. I want to be categorical about that because I believe that there are a number of people in political life who will talk about how we can afford it if we just do it smarter.

The outcomes need to be defined, and we need to work toward those outcomes. We can do it if we're prepared to articulate those are the outcomes. We haven't done that for a very long time and Albertans want that. They want us to do that. They care about these issues but it has just been too easy for politicians to not deal with the issues.

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

You asked what distinguishes my platform on disability issues from other leadership candidates. It is going to be about the values of leadership. It is going to be about the values of how we come to the table to decide what to do in the future. There's a particular piece of policy that I announced a couple of weeks ago with respect to AISH, and I need to tell you first of all that was something that I can't believe we haven't already dealt with in this province. It has been years. People keep talking about it and nothing ever happens, and it becomes more than a political hot potato, it just becomes politically expendable. I think that is absurd. But the most important thing and the thing that upsets me most about that is four days after that announcement, I was at a coffee party in Calgary and a woman came up to me, and she said that she heard I'm going to increase AISH payments. I said yes and her body language was quite interesting. She says well where are you going to find the money. I said well I have calculated it out. It is going to be fifteen million dollars a month. I will tell you that as Premier we have it in the budget, if it is a political priority, which it is, I can find fifteen million dollars in about ten minutes and her whole body language changed. Her shoulders dropped,

she exhaled, and she said thank you because my daughter receives AISH and we are having a meeting on Friday and nobody believed you.

I think that is absolutely tragic. What I did doesn't even deal with all of the other pieces that we have to talk about. I don't say to you that that is an announcement that resolves a wide range of issues across the table, but what it speaks to is the fact, and I hope it signals a change in the way that we have an AISH program that's supporting a lot of people right now that have a lot of problems even in terms of how it's administered. But from what I see from the work that I've done in Safe Communities, we're going to have to think about what to do with AISH because if we look at the number of people who are now probably going to end up through having diagnosis with FASD and that sort of thing, that program is going to have incredible demands put on it.

One of the questions that we need to start thinking about is what does AISH look like in the future, and I don't ask that question from the perspective of how are we going to afford to do it. When I read the questions one of the things that I am concerned about is that it still speaks to the old paradigm. It speaks to how do we make the existing systems work better, and what I know is that the system is not working. And so if the first thing we need to do is make the systems work better so that people can be living with self-respect and no stress in this province, then we will do that. But the next question becomes are these the systems that we need to have in place to ensure that we are providing the supports that people need to live with dignity and self-respect both for people who might be receiving supports but also for their families. And so that becomes a different conversation.

As a Minister of government, I received this highly publicized mandate letter from the Premier as to what he wanted me to do as Minister. I never sat in the same room with him for half an hour to talk about it. I mean I'm fine, I did it, and I loved doing it. It was a great responsibility but I don't believe that there were many ministers around that table who if they had any lack of ideas or direction got any from our political leadership, from the Premier or the Premier's office about what to do as Minister.

There are ministers who have been sitting around the table who have not understood that at the end of the day this is about public service. I am five weeks away from wanting to be the leader of the party, and I am going to be completely honest about this. The other thing I'll tell you is that if I look at what I expect Cabinet to look like in the next five weeks, there's an opportunity to completely change how decision making is done and who is making those decisions. There is the opportunity to elect leadership candidates who have so much Cabinet support that I can pretty much predict to you what half of the Cabinet is going to look like in five weeks. I do not believe that that is the change that Albertans want. I know what Cabinet needs to look like. It used to look like people like me. They are smart. They do not have to have the technical knowledge of a department. I cannot speak to the technical knowledge that you have of the sector that you work in. But I also know that if I was appointed Minister of this sector that the way that I would embrace that challenge would be to sit down for a long time and listen for days to what you're prepared to tell me and that's a set of values about how we make decisions in government. So this is about some pretty fundamental change, and it is about bringing Cabinet Ministers together to understand that the philosophy is that government doesn't work in silos and that it is not productive to be having turf wars over who gets the money, why they get it, and how they're going to run it.

And quite honestly, and you've probably worked with more public servants than I have in the work you do, my expectation is that if I am elected leader there's going to be deputy ministers who retire because I don't think they're going to want to be bothered with what I am going to ask them to do. That speaks to the fact that they should retire because there are opportunities to work with some strong public servants who could be empowered to do work. You probably know some of them, and they are probably not even Assistant Deputy Ministers. They are probably people in the public service who are passionate about making this change. Also, before I go into the next election about creating a caucus of people that believe in this work, because Albertans believe this. Albertans believe that government has become stagnant at every level.

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

The whole experience in the last three years in Safe Communities informed me of how government needs to work. Our greatest opportunity in those three years was to be able to bring people to the table who really didn't want to think differently but we were able to control the money and that brought people to the table from inside government. Once they understood that the agenda was going to be set differently, they were prepared to move. Some people are not, and we do not have any more time to let them be obstacles. One of the policies I've talked about as a leadership candidate is integration around human services.

What I know is that you can make a change when you have strong political leadership at the top. What it speaks to is where you get effective buy-in from cabinet and then from stakeholders. And when you have those two pieces coming together in a way that develops a plan, you can make tremendous strides forward in the public service. We cannot continue to work the way we do in government, and it is going to mean bringing government departments together in a way that deals with outcomes.

It has been a very long time in government since we talked about outcomes. What I take from Safe Communities is being able to talk about that long-term plan, get stakeholder buy in, then have the strong political leadership, and put the resources behind the ideas.

Thank you!