



RMA
RURAL MUNICIPALITIES
of ALBERTA

RMA Election Party Platform Guide

April 2019



As the provincial election nears, each of Alberta's major political parties has put forth their vision for how they would lead the province if elected. Within these platforms are positions on issues that would impact rural municipalities in various ways. This document is intended to summarize the position of all parties on issues of importance to RMA members. The document does not analyze or critique any positions, but simply pulls out the areas of each platform that are most relevant to rural municipalities to support members in better understanding each party, as well as holding the victorious party accountable for following through on their commitments post-election. The information is divided into four categories for each party: municipal issues, rural economic development, rural community issues and environment and land use.

All information below has been taken directly from the platforms available on the official website of each party and does not include various statements made through interviews, social media, etc. The wording of some statements has been changed for readability.

The parties below are listed in alphabetical order.

Alberta Party

Municipal Issues

- N/A

Rural Economic Development

- The Alberta Small Business Deduction will be doubled from \$500,000 to \$1,000,000. All other aspects of the Small Business Deduction will remain the same, including the existing small business tax rate of 2%.
- Establish the Business Certainty Guarantee on day one of taking office. Under this Guarantee, businesses and investors can have confidence that the overall costs of doing business in Alberta will either stay the same or go down during the four-year term of the government. The Business Certainty Guarantee will include:
 - Legislative and policy development processes in the government will incorporate a “costs of business” analysis. This analysis will need to happen in the course of considering any changes to, or creation or repeals of, a statute, regulation or policy. The information will need to be put before decision makers.
 - The analysis will not only assess how proposed changes will impact the direct financial costs to business sectors, but also the indirect and ameliorative effects that might be brought about by the proposed change. (For example, a requirement that businesses install solar panels may introduce direct costs to businesses for purchase, installation, etc., but may lower those businesses’ overall operating costs from energy savings.)
 - With the exception of emergency situations, an Alberta Party government will ensure that its decisions on legislative and policy changes are informed by the “costs of business” analysis. Under the Business Certainty Guarantee, business costs will need to stay the same or go down as a result of proposed changes.
- Increase the total Alberta Innovates budget by 30% to \$375M by 2020-21 and direct the additional funds to a rapid expansion of research into new uses for our resources.
- Support construction of Phase 2 and Phase 3 of the Sturgeon Refinery.
- Establish a Gas Royalty in Kind program that takes a similar approach to the Bitumen Royalty in Kind program.
- Establish Alberta’s petrochemical diversification program as a 10-year program. This would provide stability and certainty to the market, helping attract more investment.

Rural Community Issues

- Develop practices that allow trained and licensed healthcare professionals, such as EMS or nurse practitioners, more discretion in directing medical care.
- Deliver cost savings by reforming EMS dispatch and practices so that paramedics are able to spend more time in our communities and less time in the hospital.

Environment and Land Use

- Exempt homes, businesses, farms and non-profits from the carbon tax. Revenues would be offset by cuts to personal and corporate income taxes. Finally, any excess revenues would be applied directly to the provincial debt, instead of being directed to general revenues.

Freedom Conservative Party

Municipal Issues

- Respect local autonomy by returning control to local municipalities from growth management boards.
- Restore the right of appeal in the *Municipal Government Act*.
- Cancel the NDP's plan to allow municipalities to run budget deficits.
- Respect and enforce the separate jurisdictions of provincial and municipal government.

Rural Economic Development

- Abolish the provincial small business tax.
- Withdraw from federal supply management and allow Alberta dairy farmers to produce enough for Alberta's needs.
- Eliminate all trade, tariff, and non-tariff provincial trade barriers.
- Create an Alberta Labour Corps guaranteeing work for all unemployed Albertans on public works projects.
- Repeal Bill 6.
- Cancel oil production curtailment and supply management.
- Join court action against the federal carbon tax.
- Abolish all caps on energy production and upgrading.
- Reform the Alberta Energy Regulator to fix the application review and approval timeframe delays.
- Demand the repeal of Bill C-69 and C-48.
- Cancel the early closure of coal plants and allow them to remain open if they can meet reasonable environmental standards.

Rural Community Issues

- Shift resources away from prosecuting drug users to catching and prosecuting drug traffickers.

Environment and Land Use

- Eliminate the carbon tax.

Liberal Party

Municipal Issues

- A plan to give municipalities more autonomy and power which includes:
 - Amending the *Municipal Government Act* to formally recognize municipalities and their councils as an order of government within their jurisdiction, and include new sections that spell out principles of municipal governance and municipal-provincial relations.
 - Pressing for the formal recognition of municipalities and their councils as an order of government in Canada's *Constitution Act*, beyond them merely being the responsibility of the provinces.
 - Granting Calgary and Edmonton new revenue generating powers, subject to limitations.
- Require all Albertans who live or operate businesses in the floodway or flood fringe to have flood insurance, in the same manner that drivers are required to carry motor vehicle insurance.
- Work with municipalities to address urban sprawl and create more sustainable growth models.
- Grant Alberta cities control over oil and gas drilling within their own municipal boundaries by allowing them to veto, approve or approve with conditions any drilling authorized by the Alberta Energy Regulator.

Rural Economic Development

- Work with the federal government to provide rural data utility internet services directly to rural homes and businesses using the electric grid. This will allow rural communities to participate in the booming information economy and diversify their workforce.
- Put a renewed emphasis on interprovincial trade. It is currently easier to trade with many countries than it is to trade within our own and working to break down interprovincial trade barriers to grow the economy and reduce prices for consumers will be undertaken.
- Exempt any new small businesses from paying small business corporate income tax for the first three taxation years after incorporation.
- Demand amendment to Bill C-69 including:
 - Removing project approval powers from the purview of the federal Environment Minister and depoliticizing approvals.
 - Modernizing and improving, not replacing, the National Energy Board, and retaining its well-established, extensively court-reviewed process and extensive jurisprudence.
 - Including positive aspects of national and regional growth, prosperity and competitiveness as public interest factors.
 - Embracing opportunities for Indigenous economic reconciliation.
 - Increasing certainty around timeframes and clock stoppages.

- Introducing innovative approaches to minimize timelines.
- Establishing clear policy in the areas of climate change and Indigenous rights.
- Establish an independent panel of experts to review and make recommendations on any proposed future taxpayer-financed, value-added investment in the energy sector.
- Establish a new grazing lease protocol for the entire province based on the program established by the Municipal District of Taber.
- Uphold the recently-gained and hard-fought inclusion of waged, nonfamily employees of farms and ranches under Alberta's occupational health and safety and workers' compensation legislation.

Rural Community Issues

- Maintain funding for Family and Community Support Services.
- Implement a crime reduction strategy that includes the following:
 - Hire more police officers devoted to establishing a visible presence in the community.
 - Increase support for community watch groups.
 - Create a \$100 refundable tax credit for home security systems.
 - Tackle root causes of crime, including poverty, mental health and addictions issues in society.
 - Invest another \$5 million into the regional victims of crime fund.
- Make sure abortion procedures are more easily available in rural communities.
- Introduce a dedicated crisis response line and expanded mental health resources to specifically address the unique challenges of farm and rural life.

Environment and Land Use

- Create wildlife corridors to allow for the safe movement of animals, maintaining ecological integrity and increasing the viability of species at risk. This will be more necessary as climate change forces species to migrate.
- Budget much more realistically for disaster recovery instead of relying on massive supplementary appropriations. In 2018-19, the province budgeted a mere \$215,000 for disaster recovery. Budgeting would be based on a rolling average of the previous five years.
- Expand protected areas to cover 30% of Alberta by 2030. Protected areas can come in many forms and management structures.

- Work with experts, conservation non-profits and other stakeholders to strengthen our conservation policies and preserve biodiversity. An extra emphasis will be put on protecting species at risk.
- Ban clear-cutting outright while working with the forestry industry to implement best practices for developing a strong and vibrant sector focused on sustainability and profitability.
- Implement regulations and incentives to reduce the amount of freshwater used in fracking in favour of non-potable water.
- Ban off-highway vehicles in areas where they compromise water supplies and habitat viability.
- Propose an “Oil Patch Cleanup Bond” to ensure polluters pay. Additionally, putting time limits on “suspended wells” to ensure non-producing wells aren’t left un-reclaimed for decades. Timelines for reclaiming well sites will be set.
- Strengthen provincial oversight of gravel extraction.
- Use evidence-based, expert opinion to inform and guide water and irrigation policy in Alberta.
- Work with farmers to promote soil health and regeneration, boosting organic matter and reducing the use of herbicides, insecticides and fungicides by encouraging more producers to use multi-species cover crops where feasible.
- Work to expand market access for the agriculture industry.
- Help address shortages in the agriculture labour market by making immigration a high priority in labour programming and immigration policy in part through reforms to Alberta Immigrant Nominee Program (“AINP”).

New Democratic Party (NDP)

Municipal Issues

- Negotiate a long-term stable funding agreement with Alberta's small and medium-sized municipalities on par with those negotiated with the big cities.
- Create Hometown Alberta, a program to help smaller communities renovate their aging hockey arenas, swimming pools and recreation centres.

Rural Economic Development

- Implement a 10-year strategy to get high speed internet to every Albertan, no matter where they live.
- Continue to fight against punitive U.S. tariffs that are hurting Alberta industries, including lumber and steel.
- Review transportation regulations related to oil well drilling, including considering re-classifying rigs as off-road vehicles, creating an annual provincial road permit, and pushing the federal government to harmonize rig classification standards to improve cross-border operations.
- Continue to ensure full value for our resources is received. In the short term, careful management curtailment to prevent the price differential from artificially rising. In the medium term, making sure the crude-by-rail plan to get more product to market generates profits for Albertans. And over the long term, fight for greater pipeline capacity to ensure access to markets overseas which reduces our reliance on the U.S.
- Work with industry to unlock \$75 billion in new investment and 70,000 new jobs through a major expansion of refining, upgrading and petrochemical production capacity.
- Complete the High and Heavy Load corridor network to facilitate moving large industrial equipment around the province.
- Adopt a series of reforms to speed up and streamline regulatory processes for oil and gas projects without undermining environmental and safety standards. Reforms will include full implementation of the One-Stop online platform for applications by the end of 2020, and establishing the Alberta Regulatory Competitive Task Force, led by the Department of Energy and comprised of industry representatives and all applicable government ministries.
- Continue to fight Bill C-48 and call for significant amendments to Bill C-69.

- Streamline processes and reduce wait times for farmers applying for government approvals related to farmland, including environmental permits and lease transfers and create a one-stop portal for farmers to access government programs and services.
- Develop a unit to assist retiring farmers in succession planning and to encourage younger farmers into the industry.

Rural Community Issues

- Provide financial support for rural crime watch organizations so they can be more effective in keeping their communities safe and to create an advisory system to share information within communities.
- Enhance coordination between the RCMP and provincial enforcement officers to make better use of their presence in communities to maximize rural household protection strategies.
- Work with RCMP and municipal police services to direct resources to allow officers to spend more time on the street rather than behind a desk.
- Provide new support for rural Crime Watch organizations and make better use of provincial enforcement officers to increase rural household protection.
- Develop a comprehensive Alberta Affordable Child Care Program, with a phased-in expansion of \$25-a-day child care to all current child care spaces and add 13,000 new spaces over 5 years.
- Expand access to reproductive health services for women living in smaller centres and rural Alberta.
- Develop online health tools, so Albertans can access health professionals remotely to address routine medical matters such as prescription refills and referrals.
- Continue to invest in Alberta communities and keep up with our growing population by building and upgrading another 70 schools across the province, with an emphasis on badly needed high schools.
- Increase support for Family and Community Social Services organizations to make sure local social support programs can effectively help Albertans in need.
- Review and modernize grants to community groups and non-profit organizations, giving consideration to multi-year, sustainable funding arrangements, reducing the time between funding decisions and money flowing, and flexible forms of funding to allow a broader range of organizations to be eligible.

- Modernize charitable gaming rules to remove unfair barriers for multicultural groups accessing casino and bingo revenue.

Environment and Land Use

- Help farmers reduce waste with a new system for recycling agricultural plastics.
- Meet party goals of achieving a phase-out of coal generation by 2030. Continued addition of more renewable energy to the electricity system and will meet our target of 30% of electricity generation by 2030, and achieve a 45% reduction in methane emissions by 2025.
- Keep the firm cap on oil sands carbon emissions and work with industry to build upon its innovations to keep the industry strong and competitive.
- Employ the best science and prevention techniques to tackle the pine beetle infestation in an effort to slow and halt its movement eastward.
- Give landowners more certainty, implementing clear timelines for when companies need to clean up their abandoned oil and gas wells and require them to justify delays in reclaiming sites. The implementation of new corporate health measures on asset sales to prevent liability dumping as we continue to work with industry and the Orphan Wells Association to accelerate remediation of the orphan wells inventory will also be a focus.
- Partner with outdoor recreation groups to improve recreation infrastructure such as trails, staging areas and docks to create better access to Alberta's wilderness areas.
- Commit to multi-year, stable funding for watershed councils and land trust organizations so they can be more effective at protecting our water and vulnerable lands.

United Conservative Party (UCP)

Municipal Issues

- Maintain dollars promised to municipalities for 2019-20, as well as the multi-year agreement in the Bill 32 Charters for Calgary and Edmonton.
- Ensure predictable, long-term infrastructure funding for municipalities.
- Amend the MGA to allow municipalities to offer property tax incentives to attract investment and development.
- Work with municipalities to facilitate pre-approved industrial zones to streamline regulatory approvals and decision-making.
- Consult with municipalities on the province's funding formula for police services, including any burden imposed on local law enforcement resulting from the recent legalization of cannabis
- Improve local government financial reporting by preparing an annual Alberta Municipalities Measurement Index so Albertans can evaluate the performance of their local government in comparison with others on such key fiscal indicators as the property tax burden, revenues, spending, and debt.
- Revise the *Municipal Government Act* as needed to streamline the planning approval processes for affordable housing projects at the local level.
- Replace rural road permits with an annual provincial permit.

Rural Economic Development

- Create a Rural Entrepreneur Immigration Program that will invite entrepreneurs to start new businesses in smaller Alberta communities.
- Create a Rural Renewal Immigration Program that would prioritize Alberta Immigrant Nominee Program (AINP) applications from foreign nationals who are committed to living and working in smaller communities throughout Alberta.
- Incentivize media production in rural areas, following the lead of Manitoba's film tax credit.
- Appoint a new Board of Directors to the AER that will focus on improving approval times and cutting red tape.
- Establish clear benchmarks for approval times, and maintain a public dashboard of the AER's key performance metrics.

- Aim to have the fastest approvals in North America, reducing AER timelines by at least 50%.
- Streamline and expedite the AER's review processes to bring greater certainty and stability to our investment climate.
- Consult on land sales in order to replace good agricultural land lost to urban expansion by cooperating with municipalities seeking auctions on parcels of Crown land for agricultural use, where appropriate. Such disposition of Crown land would be subject to consultation with First Nations communities and others. In one case, Mackenzie County seeks to complete an auction of about 100,000 acres. To put this request in perspective, there are approximately 100 million acres of Alberta Crown land.
- Immediately launch comprehensive consultations with farmers, ranchers, agriculture workers, and others on how best to balance the unique economic pressures of farming with the need for a common sense, flexible farm safety regime.
- Repeal Bill 6 and reverse damaging policies across the agriculture sector to ensure sustainable farms and ranches and help get Albertans back to work.
- Streamline the Agriculture Financial Services Corporation to improve services and responsiveness to farmers.
- Eliminate the carbon tax and reduce the corporate tax and red tape burden on farmers and ranchers by one-third.
- Ensure that forest companies have long-term access to a sustainable fibre supply with our Forest Jobs Guarantee, including current quotas and forest management agreements.
- Build an interprovincial coalition of provinces which support jobs, pipelines, and our energy industry, making it a top issue in federal-provincial relations

Rural Community Issues

- Review the current funding formula to ensure that rural schools have adequate resources to deliver programs in an equitable way.
- Implement the United Conservative Alberta Rural Crime Strategy as outlined in our 2018 report to protect rural Albertans.
- Conduct an immediate review of the sufficiency of medical and forensic evidence gathering services in rural communities in cooperation with local police, Crown, and medical authorities, to determine what improvements are required - particularly concerning sexual assaults.

- Review current Criminal Code sentencing principles to ensure and recommend that in rural crime offences, specific facts be considered by a sentencing court as aggravating factors, and that the principles of deterrence and denunciation be prioritized (particularly concerning the unique vulnerability of people in rural areas when it comes to their self-defence).
- Ensure that local municipal bylaws and rules provide flexible and affordable housing options for seniors, including unrelated seniors who want to live together and support each other in a single dwelling, as provided for in Ontario's *Golden Girls Act*.
- Support Albertans in crisis by expanding programs to more communities including police and crisis teams, provincial family violence treatment programs, diversion programs and drug treatment courts, and by developing mental health court models.
- Provide Albertans with increased choice of medical practitioners by increasing the number and scope of nurse practitioners in Alberta and allowing nurse practitioners the ability to bill directly to Alberta Health.

Environment and Land Use

- Immediately form a Caribou Range Task Force of local municipal governments, the Northwest Species at Risk Committee, forestry and other industries, Indigenous representatives, and habitat scientists to review the Alberta Caribou Draft Plan.
- Ensure that the province's land use consultations and planning are completed before any new long-term decisions are made on habitat protection.
- Work jointly with the AER and industry to overhaul the liability management framework in Alberta, ensuring liabilities are covered without unduly discouraging new investment.
- Apply a mandatory \$30 trail permit fee to Off-Highway Vehicles (OHV) and camping trailers to pay for restoring and creating OHV trails and preventing damage in Alberta's great outdoors, and to hire additional enforcement officers.
- Implement a balanced back country land use plan to ensure all Albertans can enjoy public lands and appreciate the wilderness.
- Ensure that in the future, all major environmental protection proposals will be subject to mandatory social-economic impact assessments to allow the government to strike the appropriate balance between economic growth and environmental protection.
- Enforce actions against "trespass farming", i.e., protect 66-foot-wide public right of ways against conversion to crops or drainage of ditches next to rural roads.

