



VOTE PROSPERITY

THE 2019 ELECTION
PLATFORM OF THE
ALBERTA CHAMBERS
OF COMMERCE

ABOUT THE ALBERTA CHAMBERS OF COMMERCE

For over 80 years, the Alberta Chambers of Commerce (ACC) has been the independent, non-partisan voice of Alberta business. Our mission is to support economic growth in Alberta by promoting business priorities at the Alberta Legislature on behalf of our network's diverse 25,000 members.

From innovative small and medium-sized businesses to established multi-national corporations and industry associations, the ACC is committed to working with our members to improve business competitiveness across all sectors. We represent local chambers of commerce and boards of trade in over 124 communities across Alberta, steering public policy conversations within and throughout our province. Through our focused programs and services, we enable companies to grow at home and in export markets.

The ACC provides exclusive support, networking opportunities, and access to policy insight and analysis to our members. We are the bridge between policymakers and job creators, leveraging our network to connect the business community to public initiatives relevant to their needs.



THE ACC IS THE ADVOCATE FOR ALBERTA BUSINESSES

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As Albertans look towards the coming election, the ACC has developed *Vote Prosperity*: a platform for the 2019 provincial election campaign. It draws upon the ACC's grassroots-driven policy book and feedback received from our chamber members. This product is designed to provide voters an outline of priorities that will enable us to leverage Alberta's economic advantages and strengthen our global competitiveness.

Alberta is a great place to live and work, but the foundations of our prosperity are being eroded. From constrained exports to rapidly increasing provincial debt, we have identified the urgent factors limiting business growth in the province. Most importantly, we face the reality that the cost of doing business in Alberta is high relative to our competitor jurisdictions, due in no small part to government policies such as a carbon levy, onerous labour law reforms, and a burdensome regulatory environment.

Businesses are the backbone of Alberta's economy and the foundation for healthy and vibrant communities. To ensure the next provincial election addresses the most important issues for businesses to thrive, *Vote Prosperity* is a reflection of the four fundamental pillars of a stronger Alberta:

- Strengthening Business Competitiveness
- Growing Provincial Trade
- Building Healthy Communities
- Improving Government Accountability

Within these four pillars, we have identified 17 priority policy recommendations to bolster Alberta's long-term economic outcomes and position us for tomorrow's opportunities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

| PILLAR | RECOMMENDATION |
|--|---|
| <p>Strengthening Business Competitiveness</p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Reduce the regulatory cost burden and uncertainty for business. 2. Implement “layered cost” economic impact assessments as part of the policy development process. 3. Provide reasonable time for consultation before implementing new policies, with appropriate timeframes for businesses to adjust. 4. Regardless of public policy approach chosen, mitigate and minimize risks to business competitiveness while reducing Alberta’s greenhouse gas emissions. 5. Ensure the Workers Compensation Board and the Labour Relations Board protect the interests of both employers and employees. |
| <p>Growing Provincial Trade</p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. Consider all measures to hold provinces and the Government of Canada to their commitments under the Canadian Free Trade and New West Partnership Trade Agreements. 7. Facilitate private development of trade infrastructure that moves Alberta’s energy resources and products to new and diverse markets. 8. Invest in trade corridors to increase interprovincial and international exports. 9. Increase the use of public-private partnerships in provincial infrastructure projects and support greater use of these models by municipalities. |
| <p>Building Healthy Communities</p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 10. Support implementation of the MicroSociety program in K-8 schools and continue to expand funding for Dual Credit programs. 11. Implement the recommendations of the Auditor General’s 2017 report on Alberta Health Services. 12. Develop a new, predictable, and sustainable funding formula for municipalities to support effective capital planning and fiscal management. 13. Prioritize transportation and infrastructure projects that are regional in scope and have the greatest economic impacts. |
| <p>Improving Government Accountability</p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 14. Establish a firm plan to achieve a balanced budget 15. Eliminate operational spending growth until the budget is balanced. 16. Immediately launch a full program and service review with external stakeholder input and report the results publicly. 17. Consult broadly with external stakeholders on the best way to stabilize government revenues and expenditures, including an assessment of all revenue options and tools. |

INTRODUCTION

The 2019 Alberta election comes at a pivotal time for the province.

Viewing Alberta's economy from afar, the story appears to be a positive one: In 2017, Alberta's GDP growth outpaced that of all G7 countriesⁱ and the number of jobs lost during the recession was recovered by the final quarter.ⁱⁱ Looking forward, private-sector forecasters project Alberta's real GDP to increase on average by 2.4 percent in 2018 and 2019.ⁱⁱⁱ

Beneath these metrics, unfortunately, is a very different reality for Alberta businesses. They have made clear that ever-rising costs are creating a significant challenge. High input costs – such as labour and energy – alongside the on-going limitations in moving our oil and gas products to market,^{iv} are discouraging the investments needed for sustained growth. As such, only 54.8 % of Alberta's small businesses are confident in our province's economic outlook.^v

Each change government makes that adds a new layer of cost to business results in fewer jobs, less opportunity, and the erosion of long-term prosperity for the entire province.

Alberta's move to a \$15 minimum wage rate has taken its toll on businesses who are also faced with higher costs for overtime, holidays, and restrictions on how they schedule workers. Estimates suggest Alberta may lose 25,000 jobs by the end of 2018 due to minimum wage increases alone.^{vi} Corporate tax increases along with the provincial carbon levy and costlier environmental regulations have resulted in weak job growth, layoffs, and the highest unemployment rate outside of Atlantic Canada.^{vii}

Even as oil sands producers increase production, a lack of pipelines and rail capacity force us to take a lower price for our oil relative to our global competitors. Governments have placed significant hope in the Trans Mountain Expansion Project to alleviate this differential and to remove the ceiling on Alberta's growth potential. However, industry experts indicate Trans Mountain is only one of three

major pipeline projects still under active development. All three projects will be needed to export the additional 2 million barrels western Canada will produce per day by 2035.^{viii}

Why should Albertans, and the political parties vying for their votes in 2019, concern themselves with these specific challenges? Industry is the backbone of our economy – a thriving private sector is the most important source of greater living standards and well-being for all. Businesses provide employment opportunities, develop skills, and create and share knowledge and technology.

Albertans are troubled by today's economic realities.

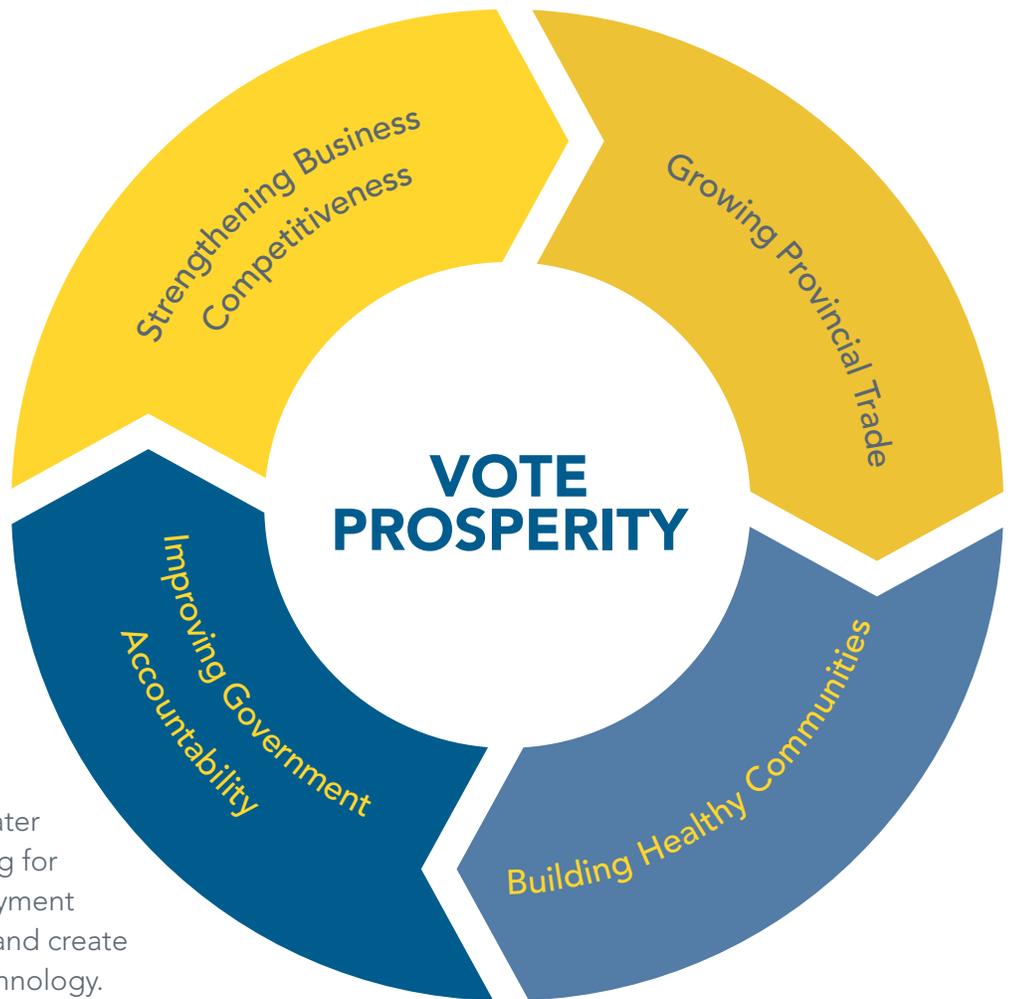
70 percent believe that next year, their household situation will be the same or worse than it is today and over half (53 percent) believe Alberta's economy will stagnate or get worse soon.^{ix} Nearly one in four (24 percent) believe the single most important issue we face is the oil and gas industry or pipelines while another quarter (23 percent) name the economy more generally.^x

Amidst these concerns, however, Alberta has the potential to forge a smart, balanced path forward. This will require each political party to develop a plan for rebuilding confidence in the economy and to establish a long-term vision for the prosperity of the province.

That vision will require deep thinking on some very difficult questions. As we rapidly move towards a technology-driven knowledge economy, what is our competitive advantage? What are the future sources of Alberta's prosperity?

To inspire Alberta's political parties to take up this challenge, the ACC has developed its own election platform, built on four fundamental pillars of prosperity. Together, these pillars represent an aspirational policy strategy for Alberta.

Only bold action and leadership will strengthen Alberta's position in the global economy. We encourage all parties to adopt the following recommendations and urge all Albertans to *Vote Prosperity*.







STRENGTHENING BUSINESS COMPETITIVENESS

CHALLENGES

Every business in Alberta is facing challenges from rising input costs, especially those resulting from government regulation and policy. As operating a business becomes more difficult and more expensive, their ability to compete is increasingly limited.

The mounting costs layered onto the backs of business by government policy is the single greatest challenge to Alberta's business competitiveness and shared prosperity.

Adding to this struggle is the feeling amongst Alberta businesses that politicians, regardless of political stripe, are insensitive to the cumulative financial and regulatory burden imposed by public policy. Input costs cannot be addressed by simply reducing taxes. Recent reductions in the small business tax (a maximum savings of \$5,000) pale in comparison with the mountain of new and growing costs facing businesses' bottom lines. One estimate indicates the carbon levy increased costs on restaurants and hospitality businesses by over \$36,000 annually^{xi} and new labour regulations could cost an additional \$11,000 on a single statutory holiday.^{xii}

Government hasn't taken enough time to hear from Albertans of all stripes. When consultations occur, feedback is often ignored, turning opportunities for meaningful engagement into "tick the box exercises". In the coming years, the government must make a point to engage meaningfully on all policy changes and **DO NO HARM** to businesses or our communities.



Imbalance in Climate Policy

- 73 percent of businesses indicated their costs will increase due to the carbon levy, while only 21 percent of those businesses believe they will be able raise their prices to compensate.^{xiii}



Growing costs of labour

- 55 percent of businesses with minimum wage staff have laid-off workers due to the minimum wage increases to-date.^{xiv}
- Flexible working arrangements, overtime, and leaves of absence are costlier to businesses under new regulations introduced in the past two years.



Declining investment in Alberta

- Conventional oil drilling activity is about two-thirds recovered from pre-recession levels. Investment in oil sands, natural gas, and commercial projects have been even more subdued.^{xv}

OUR PRIORITIES

To strengthen business competitiveness, the ACC encourages the next government to:

1. **Reduce the regulatory cost burden and uncertainty for business;**

Costs from complying with increasing regulation are choking Alberta's free enterprise. In a 2017 survey of energy-sector executives, 68 percent said environmental regulations would deter investment, compared to only 32 percent who felt the same way about regulations in 2013.

^{xvi} While pursuing goals such as environmental stewardship or labour protection, the next government must ensure it also reduces the cost burden of these regulations.

2. **Implement "layered cost" economic impact assessments as part of the policy development process;**

Layers of costs come from different orders of government and different policies but have real, compounding effects as businesses scale back hours, cut shifts, and let staff go to ensure they survive. Heritage Park, a Calgary landmark, estimates additional costs of the carbon tax and minimum wage increases will hit \$1.7 million by 2019.^{xvii} This could force programming cuts without more taxpayer support. The Government has not consistently analysed the impact of policy endeavours on businesses to determine what unintended consequences may occur. Where such analyses have been done, they are not always made public.

3. Provide reasonable time for consultation before implementing new policies, with appropriate timeframes for businesses to adjust;

Greater stakeholder participation throughout the policy cycle is necessary for Alberta. In the interest of transparent government, avoiding unintended consequences, and partnering with job creators, serious consideration must be given to stakeholder consultation. Government must particularly consult on timelines and roll-out processes. A closer, more permanent partnership with all stakeholders, including the private sector, academia, and civil society organizations, minimizes the unforeseen impacts of hasty decision-making. Rushing changes or new legislation is never acceptable.

4. Regardless of the approach chosen, mitigate and minimize risks to business competitiveness while reducing Alberta's greenhouse gas emissions;

Tackling greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and climate change is critical to the sustainability of our planet. Our approach to reducing GHGs should include enough time to develop new technologies that help us transition to a low-carbon economy and a plan to keep us competitive. This includes, but is not limited to, supporting businesses with revenue-neutral emissions reductions.

5. Ensure the Workers Compensation Board and the Labour Relations Board protect the interests of both employers and employees.

Recent changes to the Workers Compensation Board and the Labour Relations Board has cast doubt on employers' abilities to build good relationships with their employees. Both employers and employees need confidence that the leadership of these organizations will provide fair, balanced decisions that will neither undermine workers' rights nor hinder job creation.







GROWING PROVINCIAL TRADE

CHALLENGES

Alberta is dependent on the proper functioning of federalism to move our goods to markets worldwide. Over 85% of Alberta's exports are destined for markets in the United States.^{xviii} While previous governments have agreed we need to get our goods and services to new markets, barriers continue to exist. Creating infrastructure and overcoming regulatory and jurisdictional barriers to the movement and sale of Alberta's goods must be a priority to achieve expanding prosperity.



Certainty for oil pipelines

- In the last several years, key pipelines have been cancelled or denied approval, casting doubt on viability of future proposals.



Selling goods in other Provinces

- In many cases, businesses indicate it is easier to export internationally than it is to move goods to or through other Canadian provinces with barriers to trade costing the Canadian economy up to \$14 billion each year.^{xix}



Strategy for trade infrastructure

- Alberta lacks a coordinated provincial strategy resulting in corridors through which goods can easily move to any market.



Tanker ban

- Federal legislation banning tanker traffic on the northern half of Canada's west coast means Alberta will continue to face a steep discount on its oil.

OUR PRIORITIES

Expanded access to markets, especially for key industries such as oil and gas, creates opportunities for every business and community that serves them, from construction crews to coffee shops.

To expand market access, the ACC encourages the next government to:

6. Consider all measures to hold provinces and the Government of Canada to their commitments under the Canadian Free Trade and New West Partnership Trade Agreements;

Shared prosperity for Albertans and all Canadians is only achievable when our agreements that promote free trade within and throughout our country are upheld. Alberta's partners in confederation - neighbouring provinces and the federal government - have failed to effectively promote our joint prosperity. The B.C. Government's court challenge and other attempts to block the Trans Mountain Pipeline frames our prosperity at odds with our neighbours. Both we and our neighbours are guilty of restricting free market access for all Canadian companies to bid on public infrastructure projects and to sell their products freely.

7. Facilitate private development of trade infrastructure that moves Alberta's energy resources and products to new and diverse markets;

New federal legislation, such as Bill C-69, does not clearly explain the requirements for companies to build pipelines and other infrastructure that helps move our goods to other countries. This undermines investment in Canada's businesses - especially the mining and energy sectors - and forces us to sell our oil at a discounted rate to American buyers. The lost revenue for Government resulting from being unable to move oil is about \$7.2 billion a year,^x an equivalent amount to doubling the pay of every teacher in Alberta.

8. Invest in trade corridors to increase interprovincial and international exports;

Transportation/Utility Corridors (TUCs) are planned routes which combine multiple types of infrastructure. Roads, rail, pipelines, and telecommunications can be constructed in a common right-of-way, decreasing construction costs and the frequency of costly municipal land-use conflicts. Using TUCs makes it easier to plan and develop infrastructure that help our communities grow while minimizing the environmental impacts of development. A strategic network of TUCs would connect us to east-west corridors across Canada and to north-south corridors with the United States, enhancing our ability to sell everything from agricultural products to oil.

9. Increase the use of public-private partnerships in provincial infrastructure projects and support greater use of these models by municipalities.

Letting private companies carry the risk of building and maintaining capital projects can reduce the long-term costs of schools, hospitals, and roads. Public-Private Partnerships (P3's) have already saved Albertans as much as \$694 million in the completion and maintenance of Edmonton and Calgary's ring roads. To ensure Albertans are always receiving the best bang for their buck, a P3 should be considered for every major capital project.





**BUILDING
HEALTHY
COMMUNITIES**

CHALLENGES

Prosperity allows for every Albertan to live, work, and raise their family in a healthy community. In turn, prosperous communities attract new Albertans. Businesses are better able to create jobs and new opportunities for everyone when they are rooted in vibrant, healthy communities. We can support this environment by preparing students for the jobs of tomorrow and ensuring our health care system delivers the best service possible. It also means making sure our core infrastructure – such as roads, water systems, and public transit – is well maintained and keeping up with growth.



Soft skills development

- Twelve years ago, 4 out of every 20 Canadians had a University degree. Today, it is 5 out of 20^{xxi} but employers still have trouble finding employees with the skills they need.



Keeping workers healthy

- The number of patients on waiting lists for common operations is increasing. Patients are waiting a month and a half longer for hip and knee replacement surgeries than they did in 2014.^{xxii}



Broken bridges

- Up to 45 percent of the unfunded infrastructure needs in Western Canada are in transportation—roads, bridges, interchanges, traffic control devices, and public transit.^{xxiii}

OUR PRIORITIES

To cultivate tomorrow's workforce, the ACC encourages the next government to:

10. Support implementation of the MicroSociety program in K-8 schools and continue to expand funding for Dual Credit programs;

The life-long success of young workers requires them to have two critical types of skills: "soft skills" that are needed in any job, and specialized, industry-specific skills needed for their careers. Our education system needs to help students attain both types of skills. The award-winning MicroSociety Program teaches students soft skills in a practical, innovative way that builds connections between students, teachers, and the business community. Alberta's Dual Credit Program allows high school students to complete course-work which applies directly to post-secondary programs, improving the speed and rate they attain specialized qualifications.

11. Implement the recommendations of the Auditor General's 2017 report on Alberta Health Services;

Alberta health spending is the largest annual public investment we make and accounts for 39 percent of the provincial budget. Despite our investment in protecting the well-being of our citizens, we are not seeing sufficient results. The Auditor General has reported that a re-structuring of Alberta's Health Care System is needed to provide the same level of care as systems in other jurisdictions.^{xxiv}

12. Develop a new, predictable, and sustainable funding formula for municipalities to support effective capital planning and fiscal management; and

Municipal governments own nearly 60 percent of our core infrastructure.^{xxv} Despite this, they primarily depend on the provincial and federal governments to pay for maintaining and developing it. It is vital that a new model for funding allows municipalities to plan effectively into the future, using resources wisely and transparently to meet the needs of our growing communities.

13. Prioritize transportation and infrastructure projects that are regional in scope and have the greatest economic impacts.

As our communities grow and we move goods from producers to consumers throughout Alberta, it is vital that we look at how we can effectively link our communities together and to the rest of the world. A smart approach to transportation planning considers transportation needs among jurisdictions and prioritizes projects and funding accordingly. Rather than looking at individual bridges, highways, or hubs, such an approach considers how all these pieces work together. Doing so allows us to prioritize projects that best support the movement of goods and people.





IMPROVING GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

CHALLENGES

Running our provincial budget with consistent deficits is scaring away private investors, limiting our ability to build infrastructure, and compromising our capacity to weather future economic slowdowns. Alberta needs a common-sense approach to managing our money, but this is no easy task. We need to make some tough decisions that involve talking with all Albertans about what we are willing to pay and spend our money on. It also involves taking a strong stance on curtailing the growth of our debt quickly, starting right now.



Debt Management

- Alberta's net debt will rise nearly 50 percent in the next three years.^{xxvi}



Gambling the budget

- The current plan to balance the budget by 2023 is dependent on windfall revenue from the Trans Mountain Pipeline: a project which has been consistently delayed.



A lack of follow through

- Restructuring and cost-cutting plans for our public administration have been made but not used. The Auditor General has noted that of the last 7 healthcare delivery strategies developed since 2004, 5 of them were either not followed through or replaced before implementation.^{xxvii}

OUR PRIORITIES

To improve government accountability – and Albertans’ confidence in that accountability – the ACC encourages the next government to:

14. Establish a firm plan to achieve a balanced budget;

The Government of Alberta’s 2018 Fiscal Plan lays out a path to return to balanced budgets by 2023. However, this plan depends on factors outside provincial control and will leave Alberta with a debt of \$96 billion.^{xxviii} Since 2015, three major investment-rating agencies have collectively downgraded the Province’s credit rating six times. They consistently cite a lack of confidence in the Province’s fiscal management plan as the reason for these downgrades. A better, firm plan to balance is needed.

15. Eliminate operational spending growth until the budget is balanced;

The government should not increase operational spending at all until balance is restored. Doing so will require them to take a hard stance in negotiating public labour agreements due for renewal. It will mean no staffing increases and no increases in salaries until the labour market has rebounded sufficiently to justify wage growth.

16. Immediately launch a full program and service review with external stakeholder input and report the results publicly; and

The next step to a more accountable government is ensuring government programs and services are well-run, provide good value for Albertans, and are as cost-effective as possible. When cost-saving measures are found, government staff should be expected to put them into practice. Talking to Albertans in reviewing and improving provincial services will provide critical accountability, leading to decreased costs and improved outcomes in every part of Alberta’s public sector.

17. Consult broadly with external stakeholders on the best way to stabilize government revenues and expenditures, including an assessment of all revenue options and tools.

The challenge of balancing our provincial books and improving opportunities for the future is a large one. To find the best long-term solution, we need to consider all options and tools for how we raise revenue and cut expenditures. That consideration has to start with a tough, open, conversation about the challenges we face and the full range of our options to overcoming them. The next government must demonstrate strong leadership by engaging in those conversations.

CONCLUSION

Vote Prosperity is the ACC's comprehensive strategy to promote prosperity for all Albertans. The four pillars detailed in these pages build on one another and show the clear need for a comprehensive strategy.

We believe Alberta has the fundamental ingredients for sustainable and equitable growth – but – bold action and leadership will be required of the next Government of Alberta if we are to make good use of our opportunities. The 25,000 businesses the ACC's chamber members represent therefore strongly encourage all parties to adopt the policies in this document as part of their respective election platforms.

As the non-partisan voice of business, the ACC looks forward to working alongside the next government to pursue a prosperous future for us all.

We want to give special recognition to and thank the Ontario Chambers of Commerce for their support and guidance in preparing this document and supporting strategies.

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