



# The Clean Government Initiative

12 Steps to Transparency,  
Effectiveness and Accountability

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# Introduction

The Official Opposition is pleased to unveil our new Clean Government Initiative – the Alberta Liberal Caucus plan to restore trust and transparency to government.

This initiative arises from deeply held liberal values – values like common sense, fair play and telling the truth. Those values are precious to us. Alberta Liberal MLAs want to revitalize the Legislature and democracy in Alberta. It's the right thing to do.

Our goal is to find the rust in government, scrub it clean, and polish up our democracy, restoring the trust and confidence of Albertans and making it far easier for government to tackle the many challenges facing Alberta in the 21st century.

**Therefore, we, the Members of the Official Opposition, make this Pledge:**

We pledge to safeguard the public's money at all times.

We will be the nation's most accountable and transparent government.

We will eliminate conflicts of interest among government officials, elected politicians, lobbyists and interest groups.

We will always deal with issues ethically and responsibly.

We will strengthen checks and balances to keep our government honest.

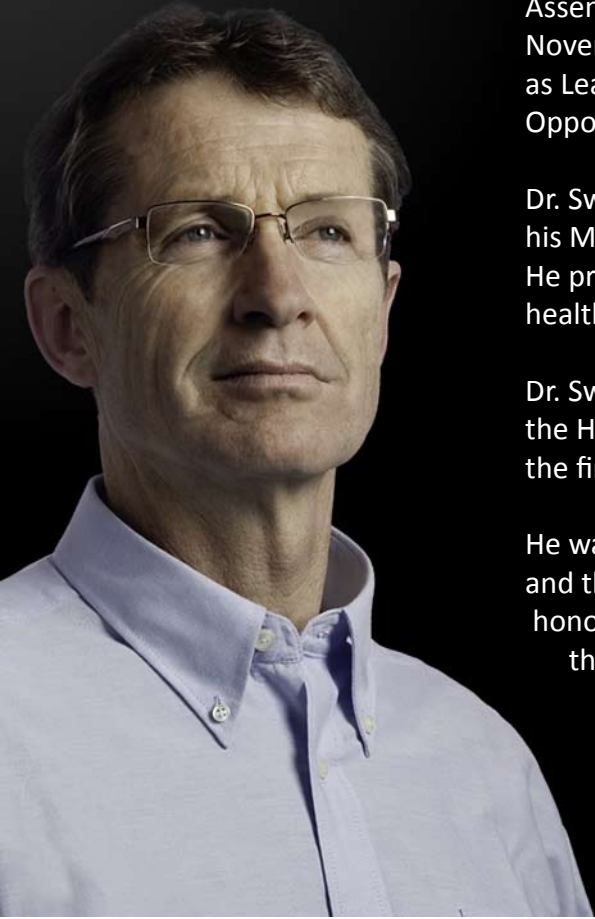
And we will invite Albertans back into the political process, because democracy is strongest and most responsive to citizen needs when a large majority of Albertans are engaged.

We pledge that we will be an open, efficient and fair government that tells the truth. Our administration will operate a clean government and public sector to restore trust between elected officials and voters.

In fact, we pledge to be the cleanest government in Alberta's history.



A collection of eight handwritten signatures in black ink, arranged in two rows of four. The signatures are: Row 1: Andrew Sun, Kevin Saff, Pang, and a stylized signature. Row 2: Bredford, Hughie MacDonald, Harry B. Chase, and Annie Blakeman.



## David Swann, Leader of the Official Opposition

David Swann was elected to his first term as a Member of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta for the constituency of Calgary-Mountain View on November 22, 2004. He was re-elected on March 3, 2008. He was elected as Leader of the Alberta Liberals, and therefore Leader of the Official Opposition, on December 13, 2008.

Dr. Swann graduated from the University of Alberta with his B.MSc. in 1971, his M.D. in 1973, and from the University of Calgary with his FRCP(C) in 1988. He practised as a family physician from 1975 to 1984 and then as a public health consultant from 1988 to 2004.

Dr. Swann is active within his community and was responsible for initiating the Healthy City Project in Calgary in 1987. He was also a part of developing the first pesticide-free park in Calgary in 1998.

He was involved in the publication of *Finding My Voice for Peace* (from Canada and the New American Empire, ed. George Melnyk). Dr. Swann was also honoured with the Gold Star Teaching Award in both 1999 and 2003 from the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Calgary.

Dr. Swann and his wife, Laureen, have three children. During his free time he enjoys peace and justice work, music and singing, jogging, woodworking, and writing.

## 12 Steps to a Cleaner Government

### **Step One. Establish an independent commission with binding powers to set MLA pay, benefits and bonuses.**

Very few people have the luxury of setting their own salary, but right now the government has that *de facto* power via the Tory-dominated Member Services Committee, heavily influenced by the Premier and the Tory Speaker.

We don't think it's a good idea for MLAs to set their own pay, even indirectly. The temptation for elected officials to pay themselves as much as possible is too



great, and sends a bad message to voters. What Alberta needs is an objective body of disinterested people with the tools and the power to set fair MLA compensation.

We propose that an independent commission be established to review total MLA compensation (salary, perks and benefits) and expenses every five years. This commission would be chaired by the most current retired Chief Justice of the Alberta Court of Appeal, and would include an expert on compensation issues and representatives from labour, business, postsecondary institutions and the public at large.

The Legislature would provide the committee with the necessary resources – sufficient funding for staff, office space and equipment – to carry out their duty. Committee members would examine MLA compensation in other provinces, workload of Alberta MLAs, cost of living and other factors to set compensation that Albertans can live with. The decision of the committee would be binding, a practice already followed by three other provinces.

The goal is not to punish elected officials or force them to live in poverty; the goal is to remove politicians from the process and set fair compensation that will draw good candidates for office while giving voters full transparency.

## **Step Two. Make all MLA expenses and compensation publically available online.**

Citizens shouldn't have to dig through libraries or submit written requests to learn how much they're paying their public servants. An Alberta Liberal administration would set up a website that makes it easy to discover how much each MLA is making, and the extent of their expenses. Doing so will ensure that MLAs keep careful tabs on their expenses.

## **Step Three. Lengthen and strengthen cooling off periods to prevent senior civil servants from flip-flopping between high-level public and private sector jobs.**

When high-level professionals do important jobs for the public or private sector, they get access to insider information that ordinary people lack. Usually executives keep this information confidential.

But when an executive leaves his job, moving from the public to the private sector in overlapping fields (for example, resigning as Deputy Minister for Health and Wellness to take a job at a large drug company),



there's an awful temptation to use that insider information to gain or give unfair competitive advantage. That's not right.

An Alberta Liberal administration would forbid senior civil servants from taking private-sector jobs in the same general field for a period of at least one year after their departure. This will limit conflicts of interest and prevent sweetheart deals and insider shenanigans that erode trust in the public service.

We would also sustain the existing cooling-off period for MLAs and make exceptions harder to obtain.

#### **Step Four. Strengthen the Lobbyist Act.**

Lobbying is a legitimate aspect of democracy. When professionals are paid by concerned individuals or business interests to meet with elected officials in order to convince them that something the government is doing (or not doing) is right or wrong, that's lobbying. Lobbying includes both oral and written presentations, and can include public advocacy and consultations with government.

We believe that lobbying should be open and transparent. Albertans have a right to know who is lobbying the government, and on what subjects.

The existing lobbyist registry is a good start, but there are too many loopholes. For example, if the government asks a lobbyist to make a presentation, that lobbyist doesn't have to register. This allows the government to make deals behind closed doors, as long as they initiate the conversation. Not in our administration!

We will create a new Officer of the Legislature: a Commissioner of Lobbying. The Commissioner will have the authority to oversee the Lobbyist Registry and every aspect of lobbying in Alberta.

This includes giving advice, issuing interpretations and guiding elected officials in fulfilling their obligations.

#### **Step Five. Strengthen the power of Officers of the Legislative Assembly.**

Officers of the Legislative Assembly, such as the Auditor General, the Ethics Commissioner and the Chief Electoral Officer are in theory supposed to act at arm's length from



the government, providing nonpartisan advice. In reality, successive Tory administrations have usurped or hampered the powers of each of these officers. An Alberta Liberal administration would create a truly nonpartisan Legislature Budget Officer, modeled on the federal parliamentary budget officer.

An Alberta Liberal administration would make these officers truly independent, free of political interference, with binding powers on government. If the Chief Electoral Officer recommends that returning officers be appointed at least six months prior to an election, for example, the administration would be bound to follow that directive.

## **Step Six. Reduce the power of the Premier's office.**

Reporting directly to the Premier's office, the Public Affairs Bureau (PAB) manages government communications, shaping the government's message and image. It is, in effect, a public relations arm of the ruling party, using millions of taxpayer dollars to promote the agenda of only the governing party and to deflect criticism of the government. Through the Public Affairs Bureau, the government has spent millions to attack the Canadian Wheat Board, "greenwash" the oil sands, attack the Kyoto Accord and promote private health care.

An Alberta Liberal administration would eliminate the PAB. We would also restrict the political communications work of MLAs, Cabinet Ministers and the Premier to their immediate staff.

Currently, government backbenchers have little power to speak out for their constituents. Puffball questions are common – all because the Premier has too much disciplinary power, and all votes in the Legislature are "whipped;" that is, if a government member votes against the government, he or she will be disciplined; they could even be kicked out of caucus. This doesn't leave backbench MLAs much room to criticize their own party, even when it's wrong on the issues.

We will establish the so-called three-line whip process in the Legislature so that only confidence votes will require government MLAs to be whipped. This would allow for more free votes in the Legislature, giving individual MLAs more freedom to speak out for their constituents.

Finally, legislature committee representation will be voted on by caucuses rather than appointed by leaders. Party leaders aren't the only MLAs who can spot talent, and the Premier shouldn't be allowed to reward loyal lieutenants with committee jobs.





## **Step Seven. Protect whistleblowers.**

Concerned citizens can often be the best safeguard against government and corporate incompetence and corruption. But they can't step forward if they're afraid of legal action or losing their job. That's why Alberta Liberals introduced whistleblower protection legislation way back in 1998 – legislation that could have saved billions of dollars in lost oil and gas revenues, legislation that the Tories voted down.

An Alberta Liberal administration would appoint an independent ombudsman with the power to certify genuine whistleblowers. Certified whistleblowers would be protected from job loss and given access to a legal fund to defend them against malicious lawsuits.

## **Step Eight. Ban all corporate and union political party donations.**

Corporations and unions have plenty of cash on hand to influence elections and elected governments. It's not right that these groups have the power to wield such disproportionate power. An Alberta Liberal administration would gradually reduce the upper limits of corporate and union donations to political parties and candidates. Within a few years, all corporate and union donations would be banned.

Proper and effective lobbying (see Step Four) is a better way for corporations and unions to have their concerns heard.

## **Step Nine. Lower election donation limits for individuals.**

"Money buys influence." It's one of the oldest truisms in politics. People that make large donations to political parties often feel that they should get special consideration from the elected government in return.

We believe that all Albertans deserve equal access to government regardless of their ability or inability to make substantial donations to political parties. That's why we'll limit donations to \$5000 per year, down from the current \$15,000.





## **Step Ten. Reform elections.**

Voter turnout has been declining in Alberta for years. More and more people are becoming disenchanted with participating in democracy.

We'll reverse that trend.

First, we'll start enumerating voters again – going door to door to create an up-to-date voter's list. Sounds like a simple, boring task, one that we don't need anymore in the Internet era – and yet, research from many jurisdictions shows that as enumeration is phased out, voter turnout drops. Enumerating voters face to face reminds citizens that they have an opportunity and an obligation to vote, and that the next election is coming soon.

Second, we'll give the Chief Electoral Officer the means and the power to redraw electoral boundaries after each election cycle, based solely on demographics, without political interference.

And finally, we'll offer tax credits of \$50 per election to Albertans who vote – a merit-based tax cut that rewards people for being engaged, active citizens. Albertans who take the time to vote deserve a tax cut.

## **Step Eleven. Increase ministerial accountability.**

We will make ministers regularly report to legislative committees. These committees will also have the power to directly question deputy ministers.

We will also broaden and formalize the ministerial mandate process to ensure that ministers have clear, measurable objectives.

And finally, we will ensure that MLAs have enough time to properly debate and review legislation, particularly Alberta's increasingly complex budgets. Fall and spring session dates will be fixed.



## **Step Twelve. Establish fixed election dates.**

Right now the ruling party can call an election not when it's best for Albertans, but when it feels it has the best chance of staying in power. The ability to call elections whenever it likes gives ruling administrations too much power to manipulate the outcome.

We believe elections would be fairer and invite more voter participation if they were held every 48 months on the last Monday in June.



## **Putting Democracy Back on Track**

Government honesty, accountability and transparency aren't just abstract ideals. They protect Albertans and ensure that their tax dollars are being used honestly and effectively.

Our pledge to Albertans will give citizens back the tools they need to hold the government accountable. It's time for the governments we elect to make openness and accountability not just a promise, but an everyday reality.

# More to Come

This document is one in a series of new policies from the Alberta Liberal Caucus. *Revitalizing Oil and Gas* is available already at [www.albertaliberalcaucus.com](http://www.albertaliberalcaucus.com). Other policies covering environment, health care, the economy, education, energy, rural issues and a new deal for cities are in development.

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