



MEETING WITH PC LEADERSHIP CANDIDATE JULY 17, 2014 Thomas Lukaszuk

CANDIDATE BACKGROUND AND REASONS FOR RUNNING

I have multiple reasons for running. I'll give you a couple of reasons. One has to do with the things that the government needs to take care of, such as the economy. For far too long we have been singularly dependent on one commodity, which has led us to a situation where we have either feast or famine, based on the price of a barrel of oil. As good as this economy has been to us, the instability has wreaked havoc on anyone who is dependent on government funding. Some years we can splurge and some years we have to really tighten the belt, which makes it impossible to have any long term funding plans.

Because of that, any candidate or any person during any election who says they can give you consistent funding is not telling the truth. No matter what you do with taxes, or what your priorities are, at the end of the day you are calculating off of the revenue from oil royalties and income tax. When the price of oil goes up, a lot of people work and a lot of people pay income tax. When the price goes down, less people work and pay income tax. It is time to diversify this economy.

Alberta has many other economic sectors that can be sustainable, such as agriculture. In the last hundred years, agriculture hasn't changed in Alberta. The machines are fancier, but we are still shipping trainloads of grain, corn and potatoes abroad to be processed. When you go to your local grocery store and buy a box of corn flakes, you pay about \$6.00. When you open it up

there is about a penny worth of corn, a penny worth of cardboard and a penny worth of plastic inside. At best, if all of those products came from Alberta we would have made \$0.03 on that purchase. Someone is making \$5.97 and it is not here in Alberta or Canada. Most of the food we produce in this country is processed abroad, brought back and sold to Canadians at one thousand times the price at which we sold it. Canada is one the few countries in the world that produces a surplus of food and we feed the world. We should be feeding the world much more refined food than just sending them the bare staples and having them make all the money by selling the refined products.

The second viable economy is bioresearch. This field is paying close attention to Alberta, but we need to create a market that is competitive enough for investments. These researchers like the fact that Alberta has an adequately sized and genetically diverse population, because this is the kind of sample needed for bioresearch. This type of research investigates medical and treatment protocols, new equipment and medications. This could affect any of the ADF member groups, for example, if they were to test out a new treatment for a specific illness. In Alberta we have phenomenal institutions that are already doing advanced research, so the infrastructure is already there. We also have a single-payer health care system, which is one database that researchers can use to compare the outcomes.

Many other provinces and countries are looking to Alberta with a great deal of envy. We have low taxes. We attract a lot of capital and we have the highest average of weekly earnings. However, there are some fundamental services missing in Alberta that we need to pay more attention to. If we are going to attract and retain people in this province, and build a province that is not just a work camp, we need to better address quality of life issues.

We still have situations where neighbourhoods are without schools or adequate senior care. Our seniors are living longer with more complex medical conditions, which require a great deal of attention to detail because no two seniors are alike and must be treated as individuals. We attract people to Alberta from all over the world, which means that we have multicultural seniors and, particularly due to the onset of dementia, may revert to their first culture. We need facilities that are responsive to these unique needs.

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

That is a big part of my platform. We need to be inclusive of all people. Alberta is a magnet and we are attracting between 100,000 – 130,000 people each year, which is the size of the city of Red Deer every year. Mostly we are attracting other Canadians and also many immigrants; they are predominately young families and their extended families, many of which have disabilities. As a province that is a beacon and attracts people from all over the world, we can't afford not to be fully embracing and fully accessible. Accessibility means different things to different people. The most obvious is the infrastructure and we have to be vigilant with our

building codes. Alberta was a leader on building codes, but now the system is much more complicated and we need to fix it because it doesn't allow us to be reflective of new technologies and innovation.

One thing that I am very passionate about because of some of the work I've done in the past is fire protection. That really speaks to people with disabilities. You will see in my platform when it is released, that any housing projects that houses seniors or people with disabilities will have a sprinkler system. Retrofitting a building that doesn't have a sprinkler system with a sprinkler system costs less than putting in a new carpet, this is not a lot of money. These facilities always find money to replace the carpet every few years so they can definitely find money to put in sprinkler systems.

In Quebec, we have seen horrendous fires where seniors and people with disabilities have perished because they couldn't be removed from the building fast enough. A sprinkler will not save the building, but buys a lot of time to remove residents from the facility before the building burns down.

DO YOU THINK THE CURRENT ALBERTA BUILDING CODE IS BEING ENFORCED?

No, probably not. The new code requires sprinklers to be put in, but there are over 100 buildings in Edmonton alone that provide services to seniors and people with disabilities that don't have a sprinkler system. The new buildings should have a sprinkler system. The problem is that the province legislates a building code, but the inspection and enforcement of the code is municipal and in some municipalities, the responsibility is further passed on to private companies.

When there is a construction boom, the lack of an adequate number of inspectors causes some inspectors to do drive-by inspections, where they give an approval sticker without ever looking at the building.

WHAT DISTINGUISHES YOUR PLATFORM FROM THE OTHER LEADERSHIP CANDIDATES?

It couldn't be more different. I will not speak to the other candidates platforms, because they can present their own platform the best. But I think that you will find that my platform is the only one that deals with social issues, provision of services to Albertans and is not singularly focused on the oil pipeline. I don't even talk about it much because it is a given. We need pipelines. We need to refine more of the products here and we need new markets.

I'm focusing more on quality of life issues because I know that if we are to attract and retain

the people in this province, from medical doctors to researchers, neurologists, artists, you name it, they expect quality of life. If we don't, we will end up building a work camp where people will come to work for five years, make a lot of money and then leave.

HOW WILL YOU ENSURE THAT PEOPLE WITH ALL TYPES OF DISABILITIES ARE SUPPORTED BY THE GOVERNMENT OF ALBERTA'S EMPLOYMENT FIRST STRATEGY?

Employment for persons with disabilities is an important issue for me. At the end of the day, if every single Canadian was employed to the maximum of their ability we would still have a labour shortage and will have to rely on the immigration program for decades to come. However, in order for us to have the social license to bring in foreign workers to fill jobs, we have to be honest with ourselves and satisfied that Canadians have been given the first opportunity for these jobs. This does not mean just putting an ad in the paper, but making sure that people have the skills and the means to fill those jobs. In some cases it may mean training, modifying employment positions, job sharing or job coaching. We have to make sure that these services are in place so that Canadians who are ready, willing and able to work have the opportunity.

Some employers go out of their way to hire persons with disabilities, such as Safeway and Tim Hortons. It has been shown that when you focus on the ability and match it with a job, persons with disabilities are just as, or even more, reliable than persons without disabilities. But, it has to be real and meaningful employment. I am not a big advocate of these "create-a-job" schemes that are heavily subsidized by the government just to keep a person occupied. There are enough real jobs available that, if supported properly, people with disabilities are able to fill.

There is a lot of work to do to remove the stigmas that many employers have about people with disabilities. There are a lot of employers that would like to hire people with disabilities but they are uninformed and this creates fear. They think that a person with a disability is more likely to injure themselves, create a liability or a human rights issue within their company. We need to provide employers with more assurance and examples of their counterparts that are successfully hiring people with disabilities.

I did restructure AISH and when you do this and you are not the premier, you have to compromise with other colleagues. I am supportive of the idea of giving AISH recipients the allowance to go to work when they can. I want to very carefully remove the sliding scale of deductions from AISH so that there are no disincentives to work. At no point in time during the continuum should it be more financially beneficial to not work. I also would like to see AISH files always remain open. If you are able to wean yourself off of AISH and return to work, your file should never close in case you experience a relapse, or the condition worsens over time. If a former AISH recipient is unable to work due to their disability in the future, they would

automatically be put back on AISH. Those who feel they can return to work often do not try to find a job because they are fearful that if they lose AISH they will have to go through the application process again, where someone may reject their application. There are many conditions that are cyclical. A person can be able to work for 6 months, for example, then their disability takes a turn and they may not be able to work for 6 months. This happens a lot with MS, mental health and episodic disabilities.

MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES HAVE A PROFOUND EFFECT ACROSS MANY GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS AND SERVICES, SUCH AS HEALTH, JUSTICE AND EDUCATION. WHAT WOULD YOU DO TO ADDRESS THESE MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES?

We need to address the issue of mental health illness within Alberta and Canada. There are large numbers of undiagnosed and untreated patients with mental health concerns, who are not maximizing on their abilities and who could live productive lives with adequate support. From a crass, financial perspective, we are costing the system much more money than if we properly addressed their mental health concerns to begin with, specifically in the criminal justice system, family services and addictions.

Two days in a row, we were in downtown Edmonton feeding and clothing the homeless in participation with community groups. Not having any expertise in making a diagnosis, I think as a lay-person it is fair to say that from the thousands that were lining up for food and clothes, around fifty percent had an evident mental health illness that could be ascertained from a short conversation. Those individuals are simply not in the position to make the best choices for themselves and as a result they are in peril.

THE QUALITY AND DELIVERY OF MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES IN ALBERTA IS AN ISSUE. HOW DO YOU PLAN TO HANDLE THIS?

There is expertise in the province but they have never been pulled together on how to deal with mental health concerns. We have a very individualized way of providing care, based on diagnosis. With physical health illness, we have managed to pull expertise together to build a comprehensive health system to deal with these issues and for some reason mental health isn't part of that. This is unfortunate because a lot of people with mental health concerns have other health concerns as well, which can often be interrelated, but are not treated as such because of the stigma.

We need to make sure that mental health illness is part of the mainstream delivery of medical health delivery process and that there is nothing unusual about it. Our young medical doctors

get it and they don't distinguish between a broken leg and Schizophrenia – both are medical conditions. Older doctors and still the government of Alberta, does make that differentiation. Someone recently told me that your brain is the software and your body is the hardware. You can't run an operating system without both hardware and software; they need to be in the same system. I am hoping to elevate the prevalence of mental health illness, make it part of the mainstream delivery of care and deal with it in a proactive way, rather than a reactive way.

ADF HAS A MENTAL HEALTH WORKING GROUP AND ONE OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS THAT WILL BE COMING IN THE FALL IS TO INCLUDE COVERAGE FOR PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES UNDER AISH BENEFITS. IS THIS SOMETHING YOU WOULD SUPPORT?

That is the proactive part. We spend a lot of time and money telling you not to eat fatty foods so that you don't develop cholesterol to prevent heart attacks. So the wellness focus is on preventing physical medical conditions. We do very little on preventing mental health illness. We deal with it as a consequence when it happens, though very poorly, but we do very little towards preventing the onset of mental illness.

WHAT IS YOUR PERSPECTIVE ON INCLUDING THE VOICES OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES IN POLICY DECISIONS MADE THAT AFFECT THEIR LIVES?

As you know, I made some comments about the Michener Centre, because those decisions were lacking consultation of those that were affected by the decision. I can't tell you my whole platform right now, but I will be releasing a list of Premier's advisory councils, on a variety of issues that will be reporting directly to the premier.

I believe that there are competent ministers appointed to a variety of portfolios, but the premier is the person who sets the tone and the mandate of the entire government. It is important that the premier be directly briefed, from time to time, on the work of the ministers, but also by the perspective of external stakeholders. I believe the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities should also be reporting directly to the premier.

THERE HAS BEEN MUCH DISCUSSION AROUND RESTRUCTURING THE ALBERTA HEALTH SYSTEM. WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS?

I don't think the system can stand yet another restructuring. With all of the previous restructuring in the last fifteen years, have we really noticed any significant changes in the quality of delivery? No, we haven't. I would rather focus on the front lines, the actual delivery of health care as opposed to the corporate structure. Did we land on the best one possible? Maybe or maybe not, but I am willing to work on the structure that we have and focus on delivery, rather than spend another two years restructuring the entire system.

Restructuring the health system is more complex than what meets the eye. There is a lot that has to happen throughout the entire industry and I think that the system is too administrative as it is. If I do any restructuring, it will be cleaning out the administration and thickening the actual delivery side. We need more people with stethoscopes and less people with clip boards running around our hospitals. The corporate model, frankly, is irrelevant. There is nothing wrong with the structure, but there are issues within the structure that need to be addressed.

YOU USED TO BE THE MINISTER OF EDUCATION, WHERE DO YOU SEE THE FUTURE OF ARTS EDUCATION?

It is part of quality of life. People are asking not only for education and healthcare, but for arts, cultural and recreational facilities, which are part of the package of quality of life. Where do I see arts education? We need to send our post-secondary schools and our youth a better package of information about what their career options will be when they have graduated from whichever post-secondary program they choose. Right now, we graduate three times the number of teachers that we will ever need. Two out of three teachers that graduate in Alberta never see a classroom. Students need to be informed of these statistics so that they can make informed decisions about their careers.

Universities see faculties of arts and education as money-makers because the funding formula rewards the universities for dropping the entrance average and ballooning the population of those faculties. Courses are funded by the government on per credit basis. A fourth year medicine course costs a lot more money to deliver than an arts class, but the university gets paid the same. Therefore, adding more students to the cheaper faculties makes up for this. We have a lot of Arts and Science graduates with no clear career path.

We have a phenomenon right now in Edmonton where there are more University of Alberta graduates registering at NAIT than NAIT graduates registering at the University of Alberta. They

graduate with their Bachelor of Education or Bachelor of Arts with a \$60,000 student loan and then they say, “what now?”, because there is no job. Then they take two more years at NAIT to get that job. There is value in any education, but we need to do a better job of telling our students what their actual prospects of employment will be upon graduation when they have that \$60,000 student loan and we need to fund our universities based on the actual cost of delivering a program. If it costs more money to produce a doctor or an engineer, let’s cover that cost. If it costs less money to produce an arts graduate, let’s cover that cost accordingly. We need to stop using one faculty to finance another.

Thank you!