



**VOTE PROSPERITY 2023**

One province.  
Four pillars.  
Our opportunity.

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The advocate for Alberta business.

# A MESSAGE FROM OUR CEO

Business confidence is the highest measured since the Alberta chamber network began tracking following the 2019 Alberta election. Questions about our province's economic competitiveness and fiscal stability, however, remain front and centre for Alberta business. Vote Prosperity 2023 is our chamber network's response to those questions.

Vote Prosperity 2023 is a platform of pillar priorities to inform Alberta's upcoming provincial election. When we evaluate our province's overall competitiveness, it's impossible to only consider the framework of one order of government. Federal, provincial, and municipal incentives and regulations all come together to make a community either an attractive or unattractive place to invest. For this reason, our Vote Prosperity 2023 campaign was the logical next step to follow our chamber's well-received 2021 local and 2019 provincial campaigns.


Albertans are strong, resilient, and hardworking. Our entrepreneurial spirit is one of the things that sets us apart as a province. This campaign recognizes that. Through the recommendations of Vote Prosperity 2023, working from a foundation laid in previous elections, it is our goal to guide us towards economic growth and long-term prosperity.



**Shauna Feth**  
President and CEO  
Alberta Chambers of Commerce



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**Vote Prosperity is a forward-looking campaign to promote long-term prosperity. It is non-partisan and not candidate specific.**

In the lead-up to the 2019 provincial election and 2021 local elections, the Alberta Chambers of Commerce (ACC) released Vote Prosperity – a platform of business priorities to inform candidates and voters. The ACC is building on these successful campaigns with another platform for the 2023 Alberta election.

Vote Prosperity 2023 builds on the four pillar themes of the previous campaigns to position our province for continued economic growth and opportunity:

- Strengthening business competitiveness
- Growing provincial trade
- Building healthy communities
- Improving government accountability

ACC advocacy is based on the grassroots policy process and research of the Alberta chamber network, 115 community chambers representing nearly 24,000 businesses. Our purpose is to enrich communities in Alberta by amplifying and advancing thousands of job creators.

Policy recommendations for government are brought forward each year from local business communities for consideration by the provincial business community across the network. Those adopted are advocated to appropriate orders of government. The Alberta Perspectives market research program—now in its fifth year—provides high quality benchmarking data on business issues by surveying members of the business community and public alike.

**Informed by Vote Prosperity in 2019, the province has made progress to strengthen the economy.** Lowering the general corporate tax rate turned declining investment in Alberta around. Opening our borders to trade and labour mobility, and leading efforts to build national trade corridors, inspired reciprocity of provincial partners with a vision to build a stronger economy together. Establishing the Alberta Indigenous Opportunities Corporation is setting a new standard for collaborative economic development to build healthy communities. And, for the first time in decades, our non-renewable resource wealth is being prudently saved for the future. Today, Alberta leads all provinces in wage growth and job creation per capita.<sup>i</sup>

**Vote Prosperity 2023 informs a path forward for the next provincial government to continue expanding opportunities for shared prosperity.** Including small businesses in Alberta's corporate tax advantage would help entrepreneurs create jobs. Reducing regulatory burdens limiting trade and competition would improve cost competitiveness for business and affordability for residents, strengthening Alberta's reputation as a proponent of commerce. Better preparing young Albertans with hands on learning would help them build careers around their talents and Alberta to develop a highly skilled workforce. Improving fiscal stability and value-for-money of local and provincial public services, would enable investment attraction and the viability of our communities.

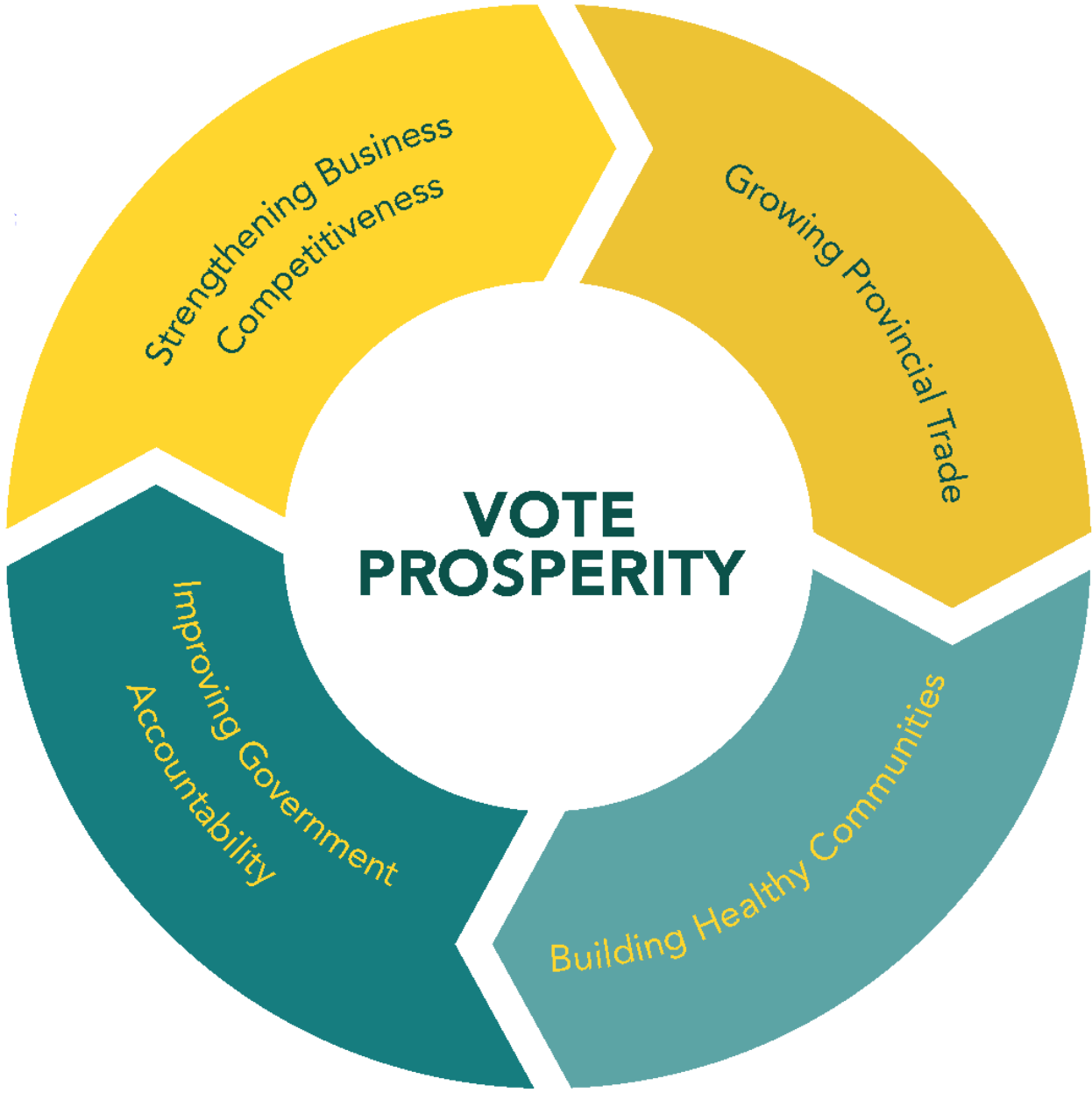
*Alberta's opportunity is to model the forward-thinking governance that will position Albertans – and Canadians – for shared prosperity.*

In acting on the priorities of job creators, Alberta will be better positioned to strengthen the national business environment with Confederation partners. The nation lacks a coherent strategy to deliver our responsibly produced energy and food to capitalize on global demand, driving investment to jurisdictions with more competitive and coordinated regulatory environments. Countries around the world are responding to global competition for talent with cohesive strategies to develop, attract and retain skilled people that can build strong economies. Inter-governmental collaboration is needed in Canada. Alberta's opportunity is to lead these efforts with a vision for growing shared prosperity.

**Albertans believe the province's business community should have a role in developing a vision and providing leadership to move the province forward.** Vote Prosperity 2023 provides that leadership. We encourage voters in the coming Alberta election to support candidates committed to our shared prosperity.



# 2023 VOTE PROSPERITY PILLARS



# RECOMMENDATIONS AT A GLANCE

## PILLAR

## RECOMMENDATION

### Strengthening Business Competitiveness

1. Lead the nation in tax competitiveness and the reduction of regulatory burdens
2. Reduce Alberta's greenhouse gas emissions while minimizing risks to business competitiveness
3. Enable competition and free trade for current and emerging sources of electricity
4. Work with Confederation partners to establish an internationally competitive regulatory environment for all industries

### Growing Provincial Trade

1. Facilitate collaboration among Indigenous communities and industry on economic development
2. Develop and expand economic corridors to increase access to domestic and international markets
3. Accelerate review and approval processes for trade-enabling infrastructure projects
4. Continue removing interprovincial trade barriers to strengthen local supply chains

### Building Healthy Communities

1. Deploy health care talent with sustainable resourcing throughout the province
2. Position post-secondary institutions to meet employer needs with high quality labour market information and targeted funding for in-demand occupations
3. Expand work-integrated and entrepreneurial learning models in K-12 and post-secondary education
4. Alleviate socio-economic and regulatory barriers to fully participate in the labour market

### Improving Government Accountability

1. Adhere to the fiscal sustainability framework and pay down debt
2. Appoint an independent panel of experts to review current and alternative revenue options with the view to deliver stable and predictable budgets
3. Do away with or make transparent hidden and duplicative taxes within provincial purview
4. Align predictable funding for municipalities with performance metrics to improve local business services



## STRENGTHENING BUSINESS COMPETITIVENESS

The first principle for government to strengthen business competitiveness is to do no harm. Growing layers of costs and regulation are creating barriers to investment and job creation in Alberta. A lack of coordination between different orders of government on strategic priorities, high electricity prices and a growing carbon levy, Employment Insurance and Canadian Pension Plan contribution increases, and likely labour shortages – are all challenges to economic growth in Alberta. The opportunity for the next Alberta government is to continue creating a provincial environment that is business-friendly and to be a strong, constructive advocate federally for our industries and improving Canada’s global competitiveness.

### Challenges

- Provincial regulatory burdens on business have declined since 2019 but continue to be cited as the heaviest burden of all orders of government.<sup>ii</sup> A 2022 survey of senior executives in the upstream oil and gas sector found that 81 percent of respondents pointed to the uncertainty concerning environmental regulations as a deterrent to investment in Alberta compared with 13 percent of respondents for Texas.<sup>iii</sup>
- Curtailment of electricity imports is driving electricity costs up for Alberta consumers unnecessarily. Business respondents to ACC research expressing the highest level of concern about the cost of electricity, doubled from 31% to 59% between November 2020 and November 2022.<sup>iv</sup>
- By wide margins, there is support in Alberta among the business community and members of the public for extracting as much of Alberta’s oil and gas as possible to realize the economic benefits, as opposed to reducing oil and gas extraction to achieve carbon neutrality.<sup>v</sup>



# STRENGTHENING BUSINESS COMPETITIVENESS: OUR PRIORITIES

To strengthen business competitiveness, the Alberta chambers network encourages the provincial government to:

## 1. Lead the nation in tax competitiveness

It is well proven that creating a low tax environment attracts investment in capital, and growth in trade and commerce. Four regions have more competitive small business tax rates,<sup>vi</sup> and most have more competitive tax rates on insurance premiums.<sup>vii</sup> Aligning all taxes paid by businesses to be the most attractive in Canada would strengthen our advantage with the lowest general corporate tax.

## 2. Reduce greenhouse gas emissions while minimizing risks to business competitiveness

Alberta is a global leader in reducing greenhouse gas emissions and the province was the first government to set methane emissions targets in Canada. Regulation to reduce emissions should provide reasonable time for industry to transition to a low-carbon economy while remaining globally competitive. This includes, but is not limited to, supporting revenue neutral emissions reductions.

## 3. Enable competition and free trade for current and emerging sources of electricity

Alberta consumers pay among the highest electricity costs in Canada. These costs are a major burden and growing source of concern for nearly seventy per cent of Alberta businesses.<sup>viii</sup> The Alberta Electricity System Operator is mandated to promote free trade and competition in the supply market yet currently restricts both, resulting in higher costs that limit business viability, growth and job creation.

## 4. Work with Confederation partners to establish a competitive regulatory environment

Regulatory coordination, and improving certainty for project reviews, are critical to attract investment and develop trade infrastructure to capitalize on our strengths in energy and agriculture. Establishing uniform carbon pricing across all sectors, fuels, firms, and regions, is the best way to enable industry nation-wide to competitively and responsibly produce fuel and food to meet growing global demand.



## GROWING PROVINCIAL TRADE

Provincial exports have consistently increased since May of 2020 and in 2022, represented 62% of the province's Gross Domestic Product (GDP).<sup>ix</sup> Alberta's economy depends on free trade and partnerships based on principles of reciprocity and mutual benefit. Expanding access to new markets and increasing trade encourages businesses to become more competitive, drives down costs, increases efficiency, and improve the quality and range of products and services available to consumers. Regulatory and jurisdictional barriers to utilize and develop trade infrastructure currently limit the full range of these benefits for Albertans and our economy. Alberta's opportunity is to continue working with the private sector, First Nations, municipalities and Confederation partners to enhance existing infrastructure and establish new trade corridors.

### Challenges

- 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.<sup>x</sup> In the last several years, key pipelines have been cancelled or denied approval, resulting in an estimated loss of over \$14 billion in revenue for Canada.<sup>xi</sup>
- In many cases, businesses indicate it is easier to export internationally than it is to move goods to or through other Canadian provinces. Removing these barriers could result in an initial 3.8% lift to the country's real GDP (equaling more than \$80 billion).<sup>xii</sup>
- Alberta has the least electricity transmission interconnections in Canada as a percentage of electrical load,<sup>xiii</sup> which creates risks for the reliability of supply and keeping costs for consumers affordable as demand for energy grows.

# GROWING PROVINCIAL TRADE: OUR PRIORITIES

To grow provincial trade, the Alberta chambers network encourages the provincial government to:

## **1. Facilitate collaboration among Indigenous communities and industry on economic development**

Indigenous communities are among Alberta's greatest partners in growing provincial trade. Establishing the Alberta Indigenous Opportunities Corporation to support Indigenous-owned businesses to partner in economic development, and expanding its mandate beyond resource projects, were positive investments and acknowledge these important relationships. Continuing to facilitate collaboration will position Alberta as leader in advancing shared prosperity for all Canadians.

## **2. Expand and develop trade corridors to increase access to markets**

Alberta's economic future depends on growing exports and imports, by enhancing existing or developing new trade-enabling infrastructure. Planning a strategic network of transportation and utility corridors (TUCs) throughout the province would support coordination of infrastructure development with partners, minimize environmental impacts, and reduce land-use conflicts and regulatory red tape – common barriers to private investment in major projects.

## **3. Accelerate review and approval processes for trade-enabling infrastructure**

For Alberta to attract private investment in critical infrastructure, provincial review processes must be timely and efficient. Private sector capital is mobile. Expediting reviews of projects put forward by experienced proponents with strong business cases would reduce delays and uncertainty which have, in past, resulted in capital flight and lost opportunities to strengthen Alberta's competitiveness.

## **4. Continue removing interprovincial trade barriers and strengthen local supply chains**

Alberta businesses identified strengthening local supply chains as the top priority for the province in 2022.<sup>xiv</sup> Growing interprovincial trade can improve business productivity and competitiveness, creating opportunities for onshoring of industry and local job creation. Helping businesses to develop resilient supply chains domestically and in North America will strengthen existing industries like agrifood manufacturing, and support growth of new industries such as critical minerals.



## BUILDING HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

Healthy people, enabled to pursue opportunity to their full potential, are the foundation of healthy communities. Global competition for talent is growing and businesses need a highly skilled workforce to compete and create opportunities in a dynamic economy. Implementing a comprehensive strategy to develop, attract and retain top talent is the next step to enhance initiatives that are improving labour mobility and credential recognition. This strategy would expand proven models and leverage partnerships such as the Talent Development Task Force led by ACC and Alberta Post-Secondary Network (APSN), to expand work-integrated learning and align programming to employer needs with high-quality labour market information.

### Challenges

- Among those reporting a significant staff shortage in December of 2022, 67% say lack of applicants is the top barrier, followed by lack of people skills (62%) and technical skills (55%). Two-thirds (67%) also indicate shortages have a significant or moderate impact on production or sales opportunities.<sup>xv</sup>
- Patient volumes are comparable to pre-pandemic levels for knee and hip replacements, but significantly less are being treated within the recommended window. Only cataract surgeries have seen a marked improvement on wait times.<sup>xvi</sup>
- Alberta had nine per cent fewer 25 to 29-year-olds in 2021 than in 2016. Combined with Alberta's aging population, this trend of more young adults leaving the province is a challenge for building a skilled workforce and healthy communities.<sup>xvii</sup>

# BUILDING HEALTHY COMMUNITIES: OUR PRIORITIES

To build healthy communities, the Alberta chambers network encourages the provincial government to:

## **1. Deploy sustainable health care talent resources and services throughout the province**

Ensuring access to and the quality of our health care system are among the top priorities for the business community.<sup>xviii</sup> Spending on health care has continued to increase but the level of service and access to medical professionals in rural communities is impacting local business communities.<sup>xix</sup> Improving accessibility to health-care services supports businesses to recruit talent and improve productivity.

## **2. Position post-secondary institutions to meet the needs of employers with high quality labour market information and targeted funding for in-demand occupations.**

Robust post-secondary institutions, which can develop the skills employers need to compete and thrive, support prosperity. Continuing to enhance the quality and timeliness of labour market information will strengthen the alignment between job creators and institutions – and funders. Targeted investments in programming and the capacity to deliver in-demand skills will enable our post secondaries to remain responsive to evolving customer needs.

## **3. Expand work-integrated learning throughout K-12 and post-secondary education**

Strong progress is being made to expand work-integrated learning (WIL) across post-secondary programming through Vision 2030.<sup>xx</sup> Opportunities to develop the people and industry specific skills students need to be successful would improve by continuing to enhance dual-credit programs in K-12, and investment to expand the MicroSociety<sup>xxi</sup> model, which develops entrepreneurial and civic skills hands-on and improves learning outcomes broadly.

## **4. Alleviate regulatory and socio-economic barriers to labour market participation**

Many newcomers, and Albertans, face barriers to fully participate in the economic opportunities this province offers – and shared prosperity. Streamlining recognition of credentials, expanding foreign student’s options to work while studying and stay after graduation, improving access to quality childcare, and raising earning thresholds for individuals receiving AISH or GIS, <sup>xxii</sup> are all opportunities to strengthen our workforce and the economy.



## IMPROVING GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

A grassroots approach to improving government accountability will position the province for long term economic growth and Albertans for a high quality of life. Accountable and transparent governance helps attract investment, creating more job opportunities and economic growth over the long term. Prudent fiscal management and simplified taxation are key measures of accountability and transparency. Alberta's opportunity is to improve these key measures with continued focus to pay down provincial debt, reduce duplicative or burdensome taxes and fees, improve the stability of government budgets, and enhance the quality of publicly funded services with data-driven improvements – locally and provincially.

### Challenges

- Relying on fluctuating resource royalties to balance the budget creates significant risk of provincial budget deficits and the accumulation of debt and associated costs of debt servicing.<sup>xxiii</sup>
- Provincial Insurance Premiums Tax and Municipal Franchise Fees (also known as local access fees) on electricity and natural gas utilities have ranked among the top three barriers to business growth in each of the past four years.<sup>xxiv</sup>
- Municipalities are key partners in creating environments for businesses to attract investment and create jobs, in turn, enabling prosperity in their communities. Sixty-nine percent of businesses believe the level of customer service they receive from their municipality falls short of the service they provide to their clients or customers, and almost half believe the quality of the service they receive compares “not at all” with what they deliver.<sup>xxv</sup>

# IMPROVING GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY: OUR PRIORITIES

To improve government accountability, the Alberta chambers network encourages the provincial government to:

## 1. Adhere to the fiscal sustainability framework and pay down debt

A new fiscal sustainability framework is a positive step to improve fiscal discipline in provincial budgeting, if adhered to. The province has a habit of spending more than it budgeted, and debt servicing costs are a significant risk to fiscal sustainability and limit publicly funded services. Debt servicing expenses are on par with the entire operating budget for Alberta Children's Services.<sup>xxvi</sup>

## 2. Appoint an independent panel of experts to review current and alternative revenue options with the view to deliver stable and predictable budgets

Volatile non-renewable resource revenues are best used for reducing debt and building long term advantages through savings and capital investments. To find the best long-term solution for ensuring fiscal sustainability and ongoing delivery of valuable public services, we need to consider all options and tools to both strengthen tax competitiveness and improve revenue stability for funding government operations.

## 3. Make transparent or do away with hidden and duplicative taxes

Transparency and value-for money are important principles of a competitive fiscal environment. The collection of provincial Insurance Premiums Tax and Municipal Franchise Fees (a tax) on electricity and natural gas do not align with these principles and make Alberta's business environment less competitive. Businesses consistently report both to be top barriers to growth<sup>xxvii</sup> and rank them lowest in benefits received.<sup>xxviii</sup>

## 4. Implement a performance-based approach to allocate sustainable municipal funding

Improving local services and reducing regulatory burdens for business would support investment attraction and job creation. Over the past four years, only two-in-ten business operators report being likely to actively promote setting up a business in the community where they operate.<sup>xxix</sup> Clear performance metrics for allocating municipal funding would strengthen shared accountability in building a stronger Alberta, and encourage businesses to champion investment in communities.

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