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THE ALBERTA LIBERALS' EDMONTON AND REGION AGENDA

Kevin Taft speaking notes
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It's time.
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Good afternoon. Thanks for coming today.

I'm happy to kick off the second day of this historic provincial election campaign by outlining the Alberta Liberal agenda for the City of Edmonton and the surrounding region.

I grew up in the City of Champions, and one of the things I've always loved about this city is its diversity. From the floor of the legislature, to the upgraders in Fort Saskatchewan... From the vast river valley park system, to theatres like this one we're standing in today... This city's reputation as an economic, educational and cultural hub is truly impressive.

And if that's what Edmonton has to offer now – imagine everything it has the potential to become.

What I'd like to talk to you about today is our vision for the Edmonton region's long-term, vibrant, prosperous future, starting with its post-secondary education institutions.

We're lucky to have fantastic universities, colleges and technical institutes here, like the University of Alberta, NAIT, Grant MacEwan, Concordia and NorQuest College. By expanding investments in these institutions, we will become a global centre for post-secondary education.

Post-secondary education is our insurance for the future. By investing in education, we'll pave the way to permanent prosperity, expand our workforce, create jobs and drive our economy, breaking free of the boom and bust cycle.

The value of the human resource of this province - that's the *value-added* resource that makes this place tick. It *has* to be our priority.

The Alberta Liberals will immediately support the University of Alberta's goal of increasing its academic capacity by adding 500 new faculty members and 2500 additional grad students a year. By allowing the U of A to expand, the Edmonton Region will become a global centre for medicine and engineering, arts, humanities and social sciences.

This will be driven by our Funding Alberta's Future policy. We plan to set aside 35% of our resource revenues each year into four key areas, including post-secondary education and the humanities, social sciences and arts. This would see the endowment fund grow to \$15 billion by 2021.

This endowment fund, in addition to current spending levels for post-secondary institutions, will ensure that Edmonton will be home to world-leading institutions, and that excellent post-secondary education will be accessible to all Albertans, regardless of background, career goals and income.

That's our first priority. Here's a list of five other steps that we will take to ensure that this city and surrounding area will reach its great potential. They are all top priorities – the last is as important as the first.

Priority Two – We will immediately begin work with municipalities and the River Valley Alliance to complete the Capital Region River Valley Park, stretching from Devon to Fort Saskatchewan, equivalent to Kananaskis Country North. Edmonton has one of the largest urban park systems in North America. But it's been thirty years since there was significant provincial investment in Edmonton's river valley, and it shows. That valley is a jewel, but it needs some polish.

Priority Three – Artists in Edmonton and the surrounding region are recognized worldwide for their daring, innovation, boldness and quality, and its cultural industries have stepped out on the world stage with confidence while invigorating our lives here at home. Surely they deserve our fullest support.

The Alberta Liberals will strengthen the Edmonton region's arts and culture sector and community. By dramatically improving support for arts and culture in Alberta through our comprehensive arts and culture plan, we will help fuel a renaissance.

The first step we'll take will be immediately doubling the budget for the Alberta Foundation for the Arts and tripling funding within three years.

We'll create an Alberta Arts Festival - with events of every kind – travelling into a different region of Alberta every second year. Think of the scale of the Alberta Games... but for Arts and Culture.

The Edmonton region is a provincial centre for film and television production and publishing. The Alberta Liberals will create an Alberta Film and Television Tax Credit to provide a competitive tax structure for film and TV production, expand performance and creative spaces for artists, and establish an Alberta Publisher's Fund, to help our provincial publishing industry grow to one of the largest in Canada.

We've all helped to make this city and region wealthy; now it's time to help make it great.

Priority Four – We'll attack the problem of affordable housing and homelessness head-on, bringing forward new solutions including new regulations on rent increases, encouraging the development of affordable housing, and helping families achieve home ownership.

Despite the thriving economy in this province, there are more and more Edmontonians who are worried they won't be able to make the next rent cheque. In the province of Alberta, this growing shortage of affordable housing is unacceptable.

We have a comprehensive housing policy to address the shortage of affordable housing units, and this morning we released our policy to end homelessness. Our policy would ensure that homeless Albertans can move beyond the shelter if they're provided access to the ongoing supports and services they need.

Priority Five – We'll make major investments to expand Edmonton's LRT and public transportation system. This will help ensure that we are leading the charge on environmentally sensitive land use and CO2 emissions, by emphasizing public transit to decrease car-dependent lifestyles.

Priority Six – We'll help ensure that people in Edmonton and the surrounding region feel safe in their communities. In the long-term, addressing issues of housing, homelessness, and better education can all help. But in the short term, we want to make sure there are enough police on the streets. That's why we will increase police funding to big cities, from \$16 to \$20 per capita. We'll also update building codes to ensure fire safety is treated with top priority.

The Alberta Liberals aren't satisfied with random acts of government. We don't think voters, city aldermen, universities, health regions, students, or anyone else should have to wait for elections to get the services and funding they need. We want to work with Edmontonians as partners to keep building this amazing city. We have an agenda that will see this city flourish forever. We can accomplish great things together if we get started now. It's time.