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## Campaign 2008 -- Week 3 in review: Viewers speak out on Alberta Liberal Leader Kevin Taft's debate performance

Edmonton – Alberta Liberal Leader Kevin Taft continued to build momentum going into the homestretch of the 2008 election campaign. Most indicators and experts say Taft swayed viewers.

Here's the results of various media online polls the day after the leaders' debate, of viewers' opinions on who won (as of 6 p.m., Feb. 22):

CFCN-Calgary

**Kevin Taft – 43%**  
Ed Stelmach – 32%  
Brian Mason – 9%  
Paul Hinman – 16%

CFRN-Edmonton

**Kevin Taft – 68%**  
Ed Stelmach – 16%  
Brian Mason – 7%  
Paul Hinman – 4%

CHED- Edmonton

**Kevin Taft – 42%**  
Ed Stelmach – 27%  
Brian Mason – 7%  
Paul Hinman – 17%

QR77-Calgary

**Kevin Taft – 49%**  
Ed Stelmach – 8%  
Brian Mason – 18%  
Paul Hinman – 17%

Again, Taft pressed forward with the Alberta Liberals' agenda with major announcements on health care, post-secondary education, child care and platform costing. In announcing his platform costs, Taft highlighted the Stelmach PC's blind spot: its record of bloated, unplanned spending. Instead, the Alberta Liberal plan will reallocate funds to fix Alberta's priorities – investing where the money will do the most good – rather than spending more.

In other news, Mark Lisac, publisher of the well-respected Insight newsletter, updated polling trends yesterday to portray the current public opinion environment based on recent polls. It showed PC support at 40% and falling and Alberta Liberal support at 30% and rising.

**It's time.**  
**AlbertaLiberal**

Here's what the media had to say:

- *The Alberta Liberals ... kept their word yesterday, releasing a package that showed the party's election promises will top \$1.6 billion. But rather than commit to new spending, the party said it would find that money by ferreting out waste - at least 5% of the total \$33 billion Alberta spends per year. The party would also freeze spending at current rates plus inflation, and would try to carve back more than that 5%.” (Edmonton Sun, February 23, 2008)*
- *“You could argue Liberal Leader Kevin Taft was the most dynamic and passionate [during the leaders' debate]. He also seemed to be the one leader who was clearly enjoying himself. During the commercial breaks he would joke with the journalists on the panel while Conservative Leader Ed Stelmach huddled intently with a couple of his advisors.” (Edmonton Journal, Graham Thomson, February 23, 2008)*
- *“Who was the most personable, the most friendly, the most at ease? I think it was Kevin Taft of the Liberals by a long shot,” (Bruce Foster, CFCN-TV Calgary, February 22, 2008)*
- *“I thought that Kevin Taft put in a really good performance. I think he looked like a premier-in-waiting. He looked comfortable and animated, and he got his message across,” (Doreen Barrie, University of Calgary professor, Edmonton Journal, February 22, 2008)*
- *“Kevin tries a little too hard on the dramatic side but, to his credit, he does not bury himself in egghead obscurity. He is clear. In fact, he repeats how the Tories have to be held to account for their record.” (Rick Bell, Calgary Sun, February 22, 2008)*
- *“I think Taft came out really well. He had a lot of connectable language. He seemed to be talking honestly. He was very passionate... The debate helped me figure out who I would ask to go for a beer with. Taft is colourful, I would probably like to go out for a drink with the guy.... I think probably the strongest was Taft because he had a bit more personality and I think he did really well in overcoming his previous persona, which was the academic egghead. He came out warm and friendly, certainly more than Ed [Stelmach].” (Matthew Blimke, academic adviser for native studies at the U of A, Edmonton Journal, February 22, 2008)*
- *“[Taft is] the only leader showing positive momentum in the polls, he had a chance to impress large numbers of voters, and perhaps shove Tory support into serious decline. Well aware of the stakes, Taft came charging into the ring right from the start, clenching his fists theatrically as he talked about grabbing the future.” (Don Braid, Calgary Herald, February 22, 2008)*
- *“Were you unable to picture Kevin Taft as premier? The [Alberta] Liberal leader probably made his aspiration believable even to those who don't care for the policy alternatives he offered. Defying Mason's attempts to paint the [Alberta] Liberals as a sort of corporate-backed Tweedledum to the Tories' Tweedledee, Taft insisted that the best way of protecting jobs is to be more aggressive on climate change, not less so, and rather effectively claimed that an estimated \$1 billion environmental charge is not so large in a \$244-billion provincial economy.” (Editorial, Edmonton Journal, February 22, 2008)*
- *[Alberta] Liberal Leader Kevin Taft managed to shed his professorial demeanour to deliver an animated denunciation of how the Progressive Conservatives have 'dropped the ball' on problems associated with growth. He became particularly animated on the state of health care. 'People are dying while we sit here and debate.'” (Fort McMurray Today, February 22, 2008)*
- *“The other thing that [Kevin Taft] did well, and from the beginning, is he talked to people. Like, if you noticed when he was talking, he was talking to the panelists and actually making contact and he was the only one of the four that, for example in their 45 second opening, didn't use a speech. He didn't use notes, and it made a difference.” (Bob Hooey, Executive Speech Consultant, Breakfast Television—City TV, February 22, 2008)*

- *“Liberal Leader Kevin Taft has skillfully positioned himself as king of the concrete jungle, with an election promise to give Edmonton and Calgary their own charters... Raising the provocative idea of more municipal autonomy strategically shows Taft as a leader who gets the needs of Alberta's cities, where two-thirds of the population reside... Taft's idea is worthy of some vigorous debate and working out those details.” (Editorial, Calgary Herald, February 18, 2008)*
- *“The Liberal platform is, by a long shot, the only one that respects the true meaning of the word ‘plan.’” (Todd Babiak, Edmonton Journal, February 19, 2008)*
- *“Taft has been providing intelligent plans for the province for years, while Klein provided none... Frankly it's Taft's intelligence that has drawn so many of us former Conservatives to back him.” (Letter to the editor from Alan Spiller, St. Albert Gazette, February 16, 2008)*

#### **And it was another week of campaign train wrecks for PC Leader Ed Stelmach:**

- *“The oil and gas industry feels betrayed from this government, and that's reflected in the amount of money we [the PC party] can't raise. About 70 per cent of our money we traditionally raise out of Calgary, so when you see a big drop in the Calgary fundraising, it hurts.” (Anonymous PC finance committee member, Canadian Press, February 22, 2008)*
- *“If we can't get the voters to like us, we'll scare the hell out of them. Heck, worked for the federal Liberals... Kevin will be cast as the taxer, the spender, the controller of citizens and might even be linked to ... gasp, hiss, where are the pitchforks ... Trudeau and his ... wait for it ... N ... E ... P. Now that's an original attack. Not.” (Rick Bell, Calgary Sun, February 23, 2008)*
- *“[Stelmach is] warning darkly that tougher measures ‘will destroy 335,000 jobs for 600,000 new Albertans.’ That kind of sweeping, unsupported assertion is hardly conducive to informed debate.” (Edmonton Journal opinion, February 23, 2008)*
- **Re: Stelmach’s claim that reducing CO2 emissions in the oil sands will cost 335,000 jobs in Alberta:** *“It's an important topic, not only because it touches on the environment, but because it deals with Stelmach's self-described image as Mr. Honesty/Integrity/Sincerity. Is that 335,000 figure real? Or, more likely, is it scaremongering? He never answered [Kim] Trynacity's question, using his 45 seconds to talk in generalities.” (Graham Thomson, Edmonton Journal, February 23, 2008)*
- *“Simply reciting his accomplishments into the record since winning the PC leadership 14 months ago may not have been enough to convince a large number of unconvinced Albertans that he - or any of the others - is the best man for the job.” (Neil Waugh, Edmonton Sun, February 22, 2008)*
- *“Stelmach kept saying, ‘This is what I did,’ but he didn't talk about what he's going to do. When we're in an election, we're not looking back, we're looking forward.” (Matthew Blimke, academic adviser for native studies at the U of A, Edmonton Journal, February 22, 2008)*
- *“Stelmach just continued to show that his government continues to be out of touch...with the average Albertan. He kept talking about 'change' and what they've done, and as an average Albertan, he's done nothing that's helped me.” (David Hartwick, Coventry Hills resident, Calgary Herald, February 22, 2008)*
- *“It was still a limp performance from a leader whose personal approval rating has been sinking since the start of the campaign. This debate was probably Stelmach's last chance to show real vision, passion, and leadership. Some people might think he did; but if they're a majority, Alberta truly has an advanced case of low political expectations.” (Don Braid, Calgary Herald, February 22, 2008)*
- *“When you're getting bushwhacked by your own help, there is something seriously wrong in Toryland.” (Neil Waugh, Edmonton Sun, February 21, 2008)*

- *“There are these Ed moments...he can't string together a sentence, looks like a deer in headlights.” (David Taras, political analyst at the University of Calgary, Calgary Herald, February 21, 2008)*
- *“Some Tories, I argued, would be happy to see Stelmach lose many seats -- though not the government -- so they'd have an excuse to call a leadership review and replace him with a proper Calgary leader. Prognostications of such sorts are always risky. But these days, I'm feeling pretty farsighted.” (Paula Simons, Edmonton Journal, February 23, 2008)*
- *The Tories were actually bragging about [the annual surplus above \$4 billion] on Tuesday, at the very moment the [Calgary Health Region] popped up and said: ‘We're jammed and we're broke - - help!’ One endlessly surprising Stelmachian quality is the Tory leader's tin ear for dangerous political situations (never mind dangerous medical ones). He just doesn't seem to see them coming.” (Don Braid, Calgary Herald, February 21, 2008)*
- *“I've heard they have some urgent needs,’ says Ed, of the Calgary Health Region. No kidding, Sherlock.” (Rick Bell, Calgary Sun, February 21, 2008)*
- *“Advocates blast Stelmach government for ignoring long-term care needs...The seniors task force of Public Interest Alberta and the Seniors' Action and Liaison Team released reports slamming the province for inadequately funding care and turning much of it over to the private sector... ‘It's about the broken promises, the government has said there will be things available and there will be support, but it hasn't happened.’ [said Chris Swaren, a United Church Minister] (Edmonton Journal, February 21, 2008)*
- *“Ed Stelmach, a Klein veteran of 13 years' standing, is masquerading as the embodiment of change. Steddie is pretending that this is Year Zero, an astonishing repudiation of the record of his former boss (and of himself), who won four consecutive majorities.” (See Magazine, February 21, 2008)*
- *“Stelmach's increased popularity apparently depends on Albertans seeing him as an amiable amateur, a political outsider rather than an old establishment pro. Voters are being asked to believe that the premier's résumé doesn't count and that if he does have any experience, he is very sorry about it.” (See Magazine, February 21, 2008)*
- *“Funny thing about chickens. They do come home to roost and no one talks anymore about how smart it was to close hospitals in a growing city, like the Tories did. No one pretends fewer beds will somehow bring more care, like the Tories did.” (Rick Bell, Calgary Sun, February 20, 2008)*
- *“I can't give you positive slogans here, because Ed is not overwhelming, Ed is not impressive, and Ed is not leading people flocking to his party.” (Peter McCormick, political scientist at the University of Lethbridge, Edmonton Journal, February 20, 2008)*
- *“Today, Ed Stelmach, the Premier of Alberta, may find he's short one helpful favour himself, after his predecessor Ralph Klein, remarking on a report he co-authored for the Fraser Institute that was released yesterday, suggested in the most polite terms possible that the new guy doesn't quite get how to maintain Alberta's economic energy engine.” (Kevin Libin, National Post, February 20, 2008)*
- *“Student leaders, however, said more aggressive financial measures are needed, while opposition parties and some political analysts derided Stelmach's Family Day announcement as doing little to ease the mounting financial crunch facing students in Alberta.” (Calgary Herald, February 19, 2008)*
- *“[Keith Brownsey, political science professor at Mount Royal College] doesn't believe the Tory plan for post-secondary will have a big impact. ‘It seems to be another instance of announcing the same policy a dozen times.’” (Calgary Herald, February 19, 2008)*

- *“Stelmach and Culture Minister Hector Goudreau released their cultural policy in late January, before they called the election, with some ambitious goals. Yet the government only pledged \$12 million in new lottery funding to a plan that, if implemented earnestly, will cost exponentially more.” (Todd Babiak, Edmonton Journal, February 19, 2008)*
- *“It was another rocky week for Conservative Premier Ed Stelmach on the campaign trail, with environmentalists and a returning officer controversy dogging his every move.” (Edmonton Journal, February 18, 2008)*
- *“Let's not let ourselves be hypnotized by the poetic alliteration of Stelmach's latest mantra, ‘Greening Our Growth.’ A more accurate epitaph for this public land giveaway would be ‘Robbing Our Residents’ or ‘Burying Our Burrowing Owls.’” (Joyce Hildebrand, Edmonton Journal, February 18, 2008)*
- *“Stelmach has felt the wrath of cranky voters during the first two weeks of the campaign: moms in Red Deer were unhappy about a lack of quality day-care spaces; oil and gas workers in Drayton Valley vented their frustrations over the royalty plan; and seniors in Strathmore demanded a new long-term-care facility.” (Calgary Herald, February 17, 2008)*

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