

February 29, 2008

Alberta Liberal government will get Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo the representation it deserves in the Legislature

Fort McMurray – Kevin Taft committed today to increasing representation in Alberta’s legislature for the people of Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Taft made the announcement as he finished off a day-long visit to northern Alberta communities today.

Taft said the Alberta Liberals will ensure Fort McMurray and Wood Buffalo get the number of MLAs they deserve, whether that is two or three.

“This region needs voices in the legislature that represent the scale and strength of the area,” said Taft.

“Fort McMurray has been struggling to keep up with the rapid pace of growth for years,” said Taft. “Schools are deteriorating, highway driving conditions are unsafe, a major shortage of health professionals is causing a strain on health services, and the shortage of affordable housing has reached a crisis. A pipeline goes out of this region, and a garden hose brings government services back.”

“Fort McMurray is a thriving economic hub of this province, and residents deserve to be represented,” said Taft.

Taft said the strains on the public services and on the infrastructure of Fort McMurray are caused by the government’s failure to plan for the economic boom.

“This region is a prime example of how the Tories’ lack of planning has let Albertans down,” said Taft. “Because the Tories didn’t properly plan for development, we have a region that is bursting at the seams and playing catch up on all major infrastructure projects.”

Earlier in the day, Taft also visited the Wabasca-Desmarais area, where he talked to residents about Alberta Liberal plans to address shortages of health care professionals, to expand Friendship Centres and re-instate a provincial government department dedicated to Aboriginal Affairs, among other initiatives.

Throughout the day, Taft spoke to northern Alberta residents about the need for better planning and predictable, sustainable funding to allow communities to keep up with the pace of growth.

Taft said increased representation for Fort McMurray in the provincial Legislature will allow the region to address critical, long-neglected needs, and will ensure that the area can be better equipped to keep up with the pace of growth.

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Taft said the Alberta Liberals will improve the quality of life for Northern Albertans by also:

- Responsibly managing the pace of oil sands development, based on a cumulative environmental impacts framework.
- Supporting value added growth in Alberta to a sustainable level. Instead of sending bitumen out of the country like Ed Stelmach’s government, the Alberta Liberals will partner with neighbouring provinces for upgrading.
- Ensuring adequate funding for rural health services to reflect the special challenges and higher costs of delivering those services in sparsely population regions.
- Implementing a comprehensive baseline health study of the residents of Fort Chipewyan and surrounding areas to assess the extent and cause of any environment-based health concerns.
- Conducting health impact assessments for all new major developments.
- Requiring mandatory watershed management planning and creating a provincial inventory of water.
- Increasing the number of affordable housing units and protecting renters from exorbitant increases.
- Creating a land-use strategy to balance industrial interests with those of communities and the environment.
- Reinstating a government ministry devoted to Aboriginal Affairs and doubling provincial funding for Friendship Centres.
- Super-charging post-secondary institutions, including Fort McMurray’s Keyano College.

“This government has had the gas pedal to the floor for 10 years, and it is time to ease up a bit and deal with the problems that Albertans are facing due to this overheated economy,” said Taft. “It’s not a matter of touching the brakes – it’s about driving the speed limit, to enable healthy, productive communities to keep up with and benefit from this growth.”

“Fort McMurray residents shouldn’t have to suffer any longer for this government’s failure to plan,” said Taft. “It’s time for a new government. We need a new government.”

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It's time.
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