

**Moving the Legislature to Albertans**  
Kevin Taft speaking notes  
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**Check against delivery**

Today, ladies and gentlemen, I have an important announcement to make, concerning the very nature of democracy in Alberta.

Elections are about choosing our representatives in the Legislative Assembly.

The Legislative Assembly is the heart of our democratic process. It is where our elected representatives are empowered to debate and make decisions of enormous importance affecting every aspect of life in Alberta.

It is in this Assembly that the public sees representative democracy in action. Every word is recorded for voters to read and judge. Every dollar spent by government must ultimately be approved in the Assembly.

Every law must be enacted through a vote of the majority.

For many, many years now this Tory government has worked to marginalize the Legislative Assembly. Beginning years ago, members of this government began speaking of 'dome disease,' as if the proceedings under that great dome of the legislature building were somehow a sickness.

Debates that should have occurred in the Assembly, in full public view, have been shifted to the backrooms. Decisions that should have been determined in the Assembly are now almost always made before the Assembly has a chance to even consider them.

The Legislative Assembly, the exact place where voters should be most able to hold their representatives to account, has become a rubber stamp.

The Tories have made legislative sessions shorter.

The Tories have invoked closure, muzzling opposition whenever an issue becomes a little bit uncomfortable for them.

And the Tories have made a mockery of debate, pushing through, for example, more than 20 bills in the last one day of session this past fall.

I have often sat in that Assembly and thought: This is wrong.

It is wrong that this government pushes through billions of dollars in spending in a matter of two or three hours, with virtually no participation from Tory members.

It is wrong that vital laws, like last year's controversial Bill 46 on the EUB, get rammed through the Assembly with procedural tricks.

It is wrong that Tory members sit in silence while one law after another slides past, never speaking on the record, never letting their voters know what they really think or where they really stand.

It is wrong that the Tories get away with blatant patronage appointments by the hundreds; with juicy financial deals to favoured friends; with bad policy that sacrifices the welfare of Albertans.

And I have often thought: if only the citizens of the province had a greater opportunity to see what happens, they would demand better.

They would demand that their government members get off their hands and stop acting like trained seals.

They would demand to know where their government members stood on issues, and why. They would demand accountability.

And for years, now, I have thought to myself, well, we can't move the legislature building out of Edmonton and take it to Albertans. And we can't bus all Albertans to Edmonton.

But maybe we could move the assembly of MLAs to the people.

Maybe we could take Alberta's democracy to Albertans.

Maybe we could open the window on democracy in this province and invite all of our citizens to look inside and pass judgment.

In the history of our Legislative Assembly there have been some important innovations in connecting it to the people. Hansard was introduced as a verbatim written record of everything said in the legislature, so people can read what happened. And television was introduced so people can watch some of the proceedings.

I am proposing today a further, and greater, innovation in giving the people of Alberta an opportunity to watch their Legislature in action.

Today, I am pleased to announce that under an Alberta Liberal government, the Legislative Assembly of Alberta will convene for two weeks every year outside of Edmonton, in order to give more people of this province a chance to see, and learn, and hold to account.

I am announcing today that I want the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to come to other communities, from Lethbridge to Fort McMurray, and do its work under the watchful eyes and attentive ears of the people of Alberta.

I want the schoolchildren of Medicine Hat, Calgary, Red Deer, Grande Prairie, and other centres to be able to watch their government in action. I want health care workers all over the province to have a fair chance to watch their government debate and decide on health care delivery issues.

I want the business leaders of Alberta to have a chance to buttonhole their representatives and put them to the test.

I want seniors and students and farmers and our First Nations people from all over this province to be able to drop in and watch what goes on in THEIR elected assembly.

I want the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to once again belong to the people who elect its members.

I know there will be naysayers. There will be those who will say it is not practical. To them, I say that in this age of instant electronic communications, there is nothing particularly difficult to what is being proposed. There is no reason that these “road teams” should lose touch with the support team at the Legislature.

There will be those who say the logistics will be too tough to manage. To them I say, in a world where conventions of hundreds, and sometimes thousands, of people occur everyday, there is nothing unusual about convening a meeting of 83 MLAs and their staff.

There are those who will claim the costs will be too high. To them I say, the value of a healthy, open, and accountable democracy is worth the price of a couple of weeks of hotel bills.

I picture the day, soon, when grade six students from across the province studying government will be able pop down the street to watch the legislature in action.

I picture the day, soon, when the restaurants of communities like this one are brimming at breakfast, lunch, and supper with political leaders who spend enough time here to get to know the place and its people, and the issues that matter to them.

I picture the day, soon, when under an Alberta Liberal government, the Legislative Assembly of the people of this province holds sessions in every region.

Thank you very much.