

Motions for Consideration at the October 2, 2016 Policy Meeting

Policy area: Electoral reform

Current GPA policy is as follows:

“The Alberta Greens would work towards electoral reform by implementing a two-step process. First, a referendum would be held to ask Albertans if they are in favour of changing the province’s current electoral system – FPTP. If over 50% of Albertans vote “yes”, indicating their desire for change, a second referendum would be held to give Albertans a chance to accept or reject the alternative system proposed by a Citizens’ Assembly.

The Green Party of Alberta would strike a Citizens’ Assembly to research, consult, advise and educate Albertans on alternative voting systems and to propose such a voting system.”

See <http://greenpartyofalberta.ca/policies/> click on “Democratic Renewal”

1. MOTION: That the existing policy on electoral reform be repealed and replaced by the following:

The Green Party of Alberta supports replacing our current winner-take-all FPTP voting system with one that produces results significantly more proportional to the way Albertans cast their ballots.

In considering changes to the provincial electoral system, a GPA government would strike a Task Force to study alternative proportional systems, consult with the public on those options and make recommendations to the provincial government.

The proportional system adopted would be used for at least two general elections after which time a referendum would be held to determine if Albertans are satisfied with the change or want to go back to the old system.

Rationale for making the change:

There is more and more support for the view that a referendum on whether a new voting system should be adopted is pointless. Many say that such a referendum is almost bound to be defeated – people want change but deciding on the kind of change to be made does not lend itself to a referendum-type vote. The better solution seems to be to adopt a new system, use it in at least two elections and then hold a referendum confirming or rejecting the new system.

The Green Party of Alberta strongly supports adoption of a proportional electoral system. Our policy should state clearly that this is the case. The current one does not.

The idea of forming a Task Force to study, consult with the public on and make a recommendation on preferred proportional voting systems is a good one. At this point we can leave open what the make-up of the Task Force would be.

This motion was proposed by Janet Keeping, Phil Elder, and Carl Svoboda

Policy area: Transition to a green economy

2. MOTION: A Green government will follow our 6 guiding principles to make the difficult choices a society may have to make between material standard of living and quality of life for future generations and, where necessary, will prioritize the latter.

GPA policy context and rationale:

Sustainability is one of the Greens' six guiding principles and this motion speaks to the significance of a commitment to sustainability as we enter a period of transition, the result of which none of us can be certain.

This motion spells out what that commitment means if and when advancing the goal of sustainability runs up against calls for the maintenance or expansion of "material standard of living." It relies upon the distinction between "quality of life" (e.g., good health, individual, family and community security and protection of human rights and civil liberties) and "material standard of living." The distinction is an important one for Greens to highlight.

The above motion was proposed at the May 2016 policy meeting by Peter la Bastide. At that meeting the vote on the motion was 13 in favour, 4 against and 5 in favour of a re-think.

This motion was proposed by Peter laBastide, Janet Keeping, and Jill Browne

3. MOTION: The GPA would support the creation of community-owned renewable energy projects.

Supporters: Susan Stratton, Alan Blackburn, John Michell, Donna Ontonio, Ann Kyle

4. MOTION: The GPA would encourage sustainable co-operative housing with both affordability and green living space.

Supporters: Susan Stratton, Grant Neufeld, Duff (Dorothy) Bond, Bernie Amell, Donna Rutherford

5. MOTION: The GPA would encourage cooperative businesses by financing cooperatives through a revolving loan fund.

Supporters: Susan Stratton, Jim Washbrook, Donna Rutherford, Ann Kyle, John Michell

6. MOTION: The GPA would encourage cooperative businesses by helping with feasibility studies into passing a business on to its workers or communities when an owner is retiring

or the business is making enough to pay workers but not investors' profits and so threatened with closure.

Supporters: Susan Stratton, Ann Kyle, Grant Neufeld, Donna Ontonio, Duff (Dorothy) Bond

Rationale: There is an essential connection between resilient and equitable local economies and the achievement of other “green” objectives. Cooperatives offer models of sustainable local employment and investment.

They come in many forms and provide many services. Grocery stores, credit unions, bakeries, solar energy producers, housing communities - some are large cooperatives, some small. They have one thing in common: each is owned and operated by members of the co- op. Members make the decisions, take the risks, often do the work, and share the profits.

Policy area: Renewable energy

1. Current policy: We have quite a few policies adopted already on renewable energy but most of them are quite specific. The broadest endorsement of renewables is this one:

“The Green Party strongly supports renewable energy, especially solar power. A Green Party government would immediately facilitate the construction of solar power stations.”

I would suggest adoption of the following in its place:

7. MOTION: Repeal the above policy statement and replace it with: The Green Party of Alberta strongly supports the development of all forms of benign renewable energy. Development of additional large, utility-scale renewable generation facilities will almost certainly be necessary (we already have wind farms in Alberta) but Greens favour small scale – at the individual home-owner, multi-family housing or community level – over such large facilities whenever possible.

Rationale: “especially solar power” in the first sentence of our existing policy is inappropriate. We need a simple, direct statement of our support for green renewables.

the word “benign” is inserted before “renewable” in the new motion. We need to forestall big hydro which many people think is renewable. Renewable it may be but benign it is not, and isn't even all that low-carbon. It is unclear exactly what is meant by “solar power stations” but if it means big, utility-scale power stations, then the policy puts the stress on large when we actually want to emphasize and advocate for community level and small. We may well need utility-size solar facilities but that should not be seen as our primary interest in solar – or any of the other renewables – because in fact it is not.

8. MOTION: The Green Party recognizes that in the move away from carbon-based energy sources to benign renewables, other values must also be protected, for example, biodiversity and the agricultural land that is needed for food security.

Rationale: As Kevin van Tighem observes, “As Alberta moves to low-carbon energy sources, it's worth remembering that not all non-renewable energy is green. Damming rivers for hydropower is particularly destructive. But so is wind power, when wind farms are installed on native prairie. Native grassland ecosystems are among the most threatened in the world. They sustain rare species, store massive amounts of carbon in the root systems, and recharge groundwater aquifers. They are not the right places for wind turbines -- those belong on already-disturbed land of which there is already too much. A responsible energy policy would protect rivers and prohibit surface disturbance of native grassland. It isn't just about carbon; biodiversity matters too.”

So in locating wind and solar farms, native grasslands should be avoided. And to preserve farm and ranch lands, renewable energy facilities should be integrated into already built environments wherever possible and when they cannot, they should be designed so as to interfere as little as possible with farming and ranching.

9. MOTION: That the province's overall renewable energy strategy be designed to take into account the mix of available local energy sources.

Rationale: Some parts of the province are better for wind than others; this is true of solar too, although perhaps to a lesser extent than might be expected. The possibility of using geothermal to provide base load and backstop when wind and solar fluctuate will also vary from place to place.

10. MOTION: That the move to renewables be managed with finesse and full knowledge of local social conditions and with as much engagement, buy-in and participation of local communities as possible. The strategy should encourage local benign, renewable energy solutions to the maximum possible extent.

Rationale: Strategy needs also to be as sensitive as possible to local communities. Motions 7-10 are proposed by Janet Keeping, Carl Svoboda, and Jill Browne

11. MOTION: A Green Party government would act to promote research and development of geothermal energy in Alberta, either through the creation of a Crown corporation analogous to AOSTRA or through a much stronger emphasis on geothermal research at AI_EES.

Relevant Current Policy: The Green Party of Alberta supports the introduction of laws and regulations that would create a level playing field for geothermal energy, both for heating and for generation of electricity. In particular, the GPA supports creation of a licensing system for geothermal wells.

Rationale: In 1974 the Alberta provincial government initiated the Alberta Oil Sands Technology and Research Authority (AOSTRA) as a Crown corporation to promote development of the oil sands. It worked together with industry partners, in most cases matching the amount of money that an industry partner was willing to invest in experimental projects. AOSTRA would obtain patents and own new technology, but would share licensing income with industry partners in proportion to their financial contributions to a project. This partnership approach was instrumental in stimulating the commercial development of the oil sands. AOSTRA was eventually dissolved and its mandate transferred to the Alberta Energy Research Institute, since renamed Alberta Innovates—Energy and Environment Solutions (AI-EES). The present AI_EES mandate includes some geothermal research, but is more oriented to cleaner methods of hydrocarbon production.

Proposed by Carl Svoboda, Thana Boonlert, Jill Browne

Topic: Energy

12. MOTION: The Green Party of Alberta supports much more rigorous regulation of the oil and gas industry. Tough regulation by the provincial government and by the agencies that operate under provincial law, such as the Alberta Energy Regulator, should apply the following principles:

- 1. The precautionary principle: a project should not be approved unless the evidence presented by the company proposing the project shows that the sustainability of Alberta's ecosystems will not be threatened by it;**
- 2. Strict enforcement of the laws regulating the industry is essential: penalties for infractions must be large enough to change the way companies do business and stop-work orders should be used as often as necessary to achieve compliance;**
- 3. The polluter must pay: the costs of pollution must be paid over the life of a project and not put off until the end of it (as by then the companies involved may no longer exist or have the funds to pay them);**
- 4. The regulatory process must be fully transparent;**
- 5. The public, including public-interest advocacy groups, should have the right to full participation in the regulatory process.**

GPA policy context

The following Green principles are particularly important in this context: sustainability, social justice and participatory democracy.

The GPA has already adopted policy on some specific oil and gas issues. But we don't have a policy statement on our general approach to regulation of the oil and gas industry. Having such a statement would be useful.

Rationale:

The proposed motion speaks to the way the industry has been regulated to date in Alberta. Basically, the approach has ignored the need for sustainability and that is what has to change. We need to apply the precautionary principle to regulation of the oil and gas industry in Alberta. That means if there is doubt as to whether what is proposed is sustainable, then the project should not be allowed to go ahead.

As is clear from the growing abandoned wells problem in the province, the Alberta approach to regulation has ignored the polluter pay principle and allowed companies to make excessive profits by unloading costs, e.g. of reclamation (of wells, the same is probably going to happen with the tailings ponds), on the public. This approach threatens the financial sustainability of the province and is also a violation of social justice – the rich get richer at the expense of others. The current approach has treated regulation as a matter (sometimes even a confidential matter) between companies and regulators. In an undemocratic fashion the current regulatory system regularly excludes or severely limits public participation. Knowledgeable NGOs such as environmental NGOs are usually excluded from participation in the regulatory process.

Sponsors

This motion is proposed by Janet Keeping, Carl Svoboda and Phil Elder.

Policy Area: Agriculture

13. MOTION: The Green Party of Alberta recognizes gains that have been facilitated by the advent of glyphosate resistant crops and a Green Party government will not act to restrict access to those crops already on the market until an adequate alternative is available.

14. MOTION: A Green Party government will begin immediate funding for publicly available and transparent research into the long term effects of glyphosate weed control, including the effects on human health, soil microflora, nutrient retention, and soil erosion.

Rationale: Topsoil, the biologically active upper 5-20 cm layer of the soil, is the essential medium in which all agricultural production takes place. Topsoil formation is a slow process; Alberta's topsoil has been built up over the 12,000 years since the end of the last glaciation. Destructive agricultural practices, past and present, have resulted in an unsustainable rate of topsoil depletion (<https://landinstitute.org/our-work/issues>). One of the main causes of depletion

is repeated tillage, which breaks up the topsoil and exposes it to wind and water erosion and the oxidation of soil organics. This situation has been greatly improved by the widespread adoption of zero-tillage agriculture. The downside of zero tillage is that it requires the use of glyphosate herbicides (e.g., Roundup) to control weeds and seed that has been genetically modified to tolerate glyphosates, both of which are generally opposed by Greens. This presents a conflict between two desirable ends, preservation of topsoil and herbicide-free agriculture. Motions 13-15 are based on the presumption that topsoil preservation by zero-tillage is the greater good, and that we should accept the present reality as a starting point and work from there in the direction of the ideal outcome, which is zero tillage and no herbicides.

15. MOTION: A Green Party government will fund projects that bring together agricultural stakeholders in participatory crop development programs in order to work toward cropping systems that maintain soil health in a sustainable manner.

Rationale: Although reduced tillage has been a boon to modern agriculture and important for the maintenance of topsoil it is inherently unsustainable. The increasing encroachment of herbicide resistant weeds coupled with the high cost of inputs required by reduced tillage agriculture threatens its long term future. The Green Party of Alberta believes that it is important to bring agricultural stakeholders together to work toward cropping systems which are both productive and sustainable.

Motions 13-15 are proposed by Jerome Backmeyer, Erika Backmeyer, and Carl Svoboda

Policy area: Housing

16. MOTION: The Green Party of Alberta supports the approach to ending homelessness known as “Housing First.” But the GPA recognizes that Housing First is an empty slogan and cannot be successful anywhere in the province unless there is an adequate supply of affordable and supported housing for those needing it to move into. Hence the GPA would ensure there is an adequate supply of both affordable and supported housing throughout the province.

Rationale: “ ‘Housing First’ is a recovery-oriented approach to ending homelessness that centers on quickly moving people experiencing homelessness into independent and permanent housing and then providing additional supports and services as needed. It is an approach first popularized by Sam Tsemberis and Pathways to Housing in New York in the 1990s, though there were Housing First-like programs emerging elsewhere, including Canada (HouseLink in Toronto) prior to this time. The basic underlying principle of Housing First is that people are better able to move forward with their lives if they are first housed. This is as true for people experiencing homelessness and those with mental health and addictions issues as it is for anyone. Housing is provided first and then supports are provided including physical and mental health, education, employment, substance abuse and community connections.”

From: <http://homelesshub.ca/solutions/housing-accommodation-and-supports/housing-first>

Relevant current policy: A Green Party government will revise and update the current provincial social housing regulations, and will develop a long-term capital plan for additions to and maintenance of that portion of the social housing stock that is owned by the province and municipalities.

Proposed by Thana Boonlert, Janet Keeping, and Jill Browne

17. MOTION: Greens would require all municipalities to have staff capable of facilitating alternative approaches to more sustainable housing, such as housing cooperatives and co-housing. The purpose of these facilitators (in essence, case-managers) would be to assist groups, wanting to build or retrofit existing buildings for cooperatives, co-housing or other alternative approaches to housing, in getting through the approval process successfully and as quickly as possible.

18. MOTION: Greens would require all municipalities to review their bylaws, regulations and procedures so as to remove unnecessary or unreasonable barriers to meeting the need for affordable housing, including for cooperatives and co-housing.

GPA policy context:

The Green values of sustainability, diversity, social justice and participatory democracy strongly support cooperatives.

History of these motions:

The GPA holds a monthly discussion group (so far only in Calgary). The August meeting of the group was a Walk 'n Talk during which participants discussed how provincial policy could better support cooperatives, both in business and housing contexts. The above two motions came out of that discussion.

Rationale:

Municipal policies toward housing tend to be biased toward historically established categories and resistant to innovative approaches. These motions speak to removing those obstacles.

Supporters:

The following GPA members participated in the Walk 'n Talk which led to the development of these motions: Roger Gagne, Grant Neufeld and Janet Keeping.

Policy Area: Human Rights

19. MOTION: That Alberta’s Human Rights Act should be amended to make it illegal to discriminate in employment on the basis that a “person has been convicted of a criminal or summary conviction offence that is unrelated to the employment or to the intended employment of that person.” (The words in quotes are taken directly from section 13 of the B C Human Rights Code. See http://www.bclaws.ca/EPLibraries/bclaws_new/document/ID/freeside/00_96210_01.)

Policy context:

Green principles:

Respecting social justice, a key Green principle, requires that we treat those convicted of a criminal offence fairly. Where the nature of the offence committed has nothing to do with the job held or the employment sought, it should be illegal to discriminate against the person in question. Where the offence is related, say for example the person has been convicted of embezzlement from a bank, then it makes sense that employers or potential employers might want to exclude that person from a job that requires taking responsibility for financial matters.

Other Canadian jurisdictions:

As quoted above, BC’s human rights statute forbids this kind of discrimination. Quebec’s human rights act takes an approach that is virtually identical to that in BC. It makes it illegal to discriminate against a person with a record where the offence is “in no way connected with the employment or if the person has obtained a pardon for the offence.” The Ontario human rights statute offers some but weaker protection in this area. And the Canadian Human Rights Act (a federal government statute) also forbids this kind of discrimination but also not as strongly as in BC like in Ontario weakly in the areas of employment, such as in the military or the airlines, which fall under federal government authority.

As to how this sort of law is meant to work:

“The B.C. Human Rights Tribunal and courts have consistently held that whether a conviction is related to employment must be considered in every case with respect a series of factors, including:

- whether the behaviour for which the charge is laid, if repeated, would pose a threat to the employer’s ability to carry on business safely;
- the circumstances and particulars of the offence, including the individual’s age and other extenuating circumstances; and
- the amount of time elapsed since the charge and the individual’s activities or rehabilitation efforts since that time.”

(This information is taken from this web site: <http://www.employmentandlabour.com/dont-be-convicted-of-discriminating-based-on-criminal-convictions>)

In the US:

There are a number of American states and cities which have adopted laws making this kind of discrimination illegal.

Rationale: Prohibiting discrimination goes to fundamental issues of fairness (social justice) as already noted. But discrimination against people with a criminal record also has a very practical aspect. If people with records cannot find legitimate work, then it will be more likely they either resort to illegal means to support themselves or they quickly end up on social assistance increasing the financial burden on government and the taxpayer.

For many reasons, we want to see as many people with criminal records as possible gainfully and legally employed.

20. MOTION: That Alberta’s Human Rights Act should be amended 1) to make it illegal for an employer to ask for a criminal record check until a job offer is about to be made and 2) where an offer is made and a criminal record is shown to exist, it would be illegal for the employer to withdraw the job offer unless the offence for which there is a conviction is related to the intended employment of that person.

Policy context:

Green principles:

Respecting social justice, a key Green principle, requires that we treat those convicted of a criminal offence fairly. There is a common tendency to use an applicant’s criminal record where she or he has one as a sufficient reason on its own for not hiring them. So to try to ensure that people with criminal records are in fact treated fairly, the proposed motion would make it illegal to ask for a criminal record check until after the applicant’s credentials have been assessed and a job offer is about to be made.

Other jurisdictions:

As far as is known, there is no such law in force in Canada but there are such provisions in effect in the US. They are often referred to as “Fair Chance” legislation.

Related GPA policy:

At the GPA’s policy meeting in May of this year, we adopted an analogous motion that would amend the Alberta Human Rights Act. That motion concerns keeping certain kinds of identifying information (names, gender and age) from a prospective employer until later than is typically the case in the hiring process. The purpose is to hold back information about applicants that evidence shows are often used to discriminate against applicants. See <http://greenpartyofalberta.ca/policies/> under the heading “Human rights.”

Rationale: Prohibiting discrimination goes to fundamental issues of fairness (social justice) as already noted. But discrimination against people with a criminal record also has a very practical aspect. If people with records cannot find legitimate work, then it will be more likely they either resort to illegal means to support themselves or they quickly end up on social assistance increasing the financial burden on government and the taxpayer.

For many reasons, we want to see as many people with criminal records as possible gainfully and legally employed.

Motions 19 and 20 are proposed by Janet Keeping, Jill Browne, and Linda McKay-Panos.

Policy Area: Infrastructure

Existing Policy: The Green Party of Alberta would apply sustainability principles to proposals for new infrastructure. For example, the question of new transmission lines would have to be evaluated in light of the need to transition to production of electricity from renewable sources which by their very nature tend to be more dispersed than huge coal-burning plants. Greater decentralization may mean less need for transmission lines and cost savings.

21. MOTION: The Green Party of Alberta vigorously opposes all P3 initiatives.

Rationale: Whether these enterprises are suggested for schools, hospitals, long term care facilities, or infrastructure they are not acceptable. They not only lessen or take away public control they also increase costs, often dramatically. With healthcare they are often the first step in privatization of the system. Governments can borrow funds at very low rates. Private companies pay the going rate plus they also have to provide profit for their shareholders, both of which add to the final accounting. The following article outlines some of the many pitfalls with examples to clearly illustrate those pitfalls. The final quote from the article is worth repeating - "P3s should be called P12s - Public-Private Partnerships to Plunder the Public Purse to Pursue Policies of Peril to People and the Planet for all Posterity." Greg Malone

<https://www.policyalternatives.ca/publications/monitor/problem-public-private-partnerships>
http://www.parklandinstitute.ca/wrong_turn

Proposed by Diann Duthie, Ralph McLean, and Chris Alders

22. MOTION: A Green Party government will assess and regulate the density of all linear developments (roads, utility corridors, pipelines, railways, power lines, telecom infrastructure, right of ways, etc.) within our watersheds in order to minimize the harm perpetrated by these interventions. Riparian reserve margins will be designated for all waterways according to size of the stream/river, the fish etc. Management areas will border and protect the reserve areas and must follow specific restricted guidelines.

"Road development can interfere with natural patterns of overland flow through a watershed, interrupt subsurface flow, and increase peak flows "(Smith and Redding 2012). "Roads are also one of the most significant causes of increased erosion, as road construction exposes large areas of soil to potential erosion by rainwater and snowmelt while the roads themselves intercept and concentrate surface runoff so that it has more energy to erode even stable soils" (WAP 1995a). The loss of riparian borders can change water temperature, increase erosion and sediment and reduce nutrients available from bank areas.

Proposed by Diann Duthie, Madeline Oldershaw, and Ralph McLean

Policy Area: Health Care

Relevant Current Policy: Green Party policy on health stresses the importance of wellness and prevention of illness through the elimination of poverty and homelessness and environmental policies that will keep our air, water and land free from contaminants which cause disease. Green policy would encourage an individual, patient-centred approach to the delivery of health services... The Green Party of Alberta supports a preventative approach to healthcare.... A Green Party government would work with health care professionals to empower individuals to improve their own health.

23. MOTION: A Green Party Government will provide funding for visits to professionals who specialize in giving advice on how to live healthier lifestyles in order to avoid and/or alleviate chronic diseases and conditions.

Rationale: Doctors tell patients to change their life styles but many need help and monitoring in order to do that. With an estimated 75% of our conditions preventable this is a cheap way to utilize much less expensive resources and reduce both costs AND suffering. Families are often far apart in this country. Whether one has a new baby, or a new condition, information and encouragement along the way can circumvent serious complications. Things like malnutrition can be discovered and could be rectified by prescriptions for fruit and vegetables.

Proposed by Diann Duthie, Madeline Oldershaw, and Chris Alders

24. MOTION: A Green Party government will ensure there are adequate mental health care services for children, youth and adolescents during these crucial early years.

GPA policy context: GPA members have already adopted several sound policies on mental health care matters. To read them see <http://greenpartyofalberta.ca/policies/> "Health Policy." One of these states that, "A GPA government will ensure there are a sufficient number of appropriately-trained and licensed mental-health specialists in Alberta to meet the needs of all Albertans."

Rationale:

The ND government commissioned a review of mental health care in the province. The report called "of the Alberta Mental Health Review Committee was issued in December 2015. The report which is called "Valuing Mental Health" can be found at

<http://www.health.alberta.ca/documents/Alberta-Mental-Health-Review-2015.pdf>

Many of the faults within our current mental health care system that are identified in the report are already addressed by GPA policy in a general way. But the fact that many serious mental

health issues first appear in youth and adolescence should receive special attention in our health policy.

The proposed motion is consistent with recommendation # 6, found on page 17 of the committee's report:

- Improve mental health and educational outcomes for children and youth through:
- a. Providing enriched early childhood education programs;
 - b. Enhancing school-based addiction and mental health programs across the province; and
 - c. Requiring all programs to coordinate with each other and integrate with the community to provide a continuum of services.”

Like other Albertans, Greens put a high priority on health (as an aspect of sustainability and social justice) and therefore on our health care system. Greens are especially concerned that health care be oriented towards protecting health and preventing illness.

Within any health care budget, however generous, we know spending priorities have to be established because there will never be enough money to satisfy every possible health care service or treatment.

We know too, and the review committee's report points this out, that many serious mental health issues first appear while a person is still young.

We also know that if mental health care issues are not addressed early on those issues often get much more serious and the consequences for successful education, future employment and for family and social life will also tend to become more serious. Therefore ensuring adequate mental health care services for children and young people, especially as made available and coordinated, through the education system is critical.

This is another of those issues where if left unaddressed to fester the problem can only get worse – for the person who is mentally ill, for their family members and also for publicly funded institutions such as the schools and for other publicly funded services down the road, such as emergency health care, policing and the prison system.

Government can pay now (earlier) for services or can pay a lot more later.

We need to support all Albertans with mental health care issues but when illness becomes evident early in life and the needed services and treatments aren't available, the consequences for both the individual and the broader community is likely to be vast.

Proposed by Coral Bliss Taylor, Janet Keeping, and Jill Browne