

## Redford CAFA Survey

No one doubts that post-secondary education (PSE) will play a crucial role in helping to build Alberta's future.

### **1. What is your long-term vision for the province's PSE system?**

**A:** I want to build a PSE system that is:

- World class, based around clusters of excellence in areas like energy and the environment that are critical to Alberta's future;
- Diverse, offering Albertans well-funded and fully staffed programs that match their aspirations and interests;
- Inclusive, allowing students from rural and remote communities the chance to better themselves without fear of financial burdens;
- Flexible; willing to shift to meet changing circumstances and producing graduates skilled at doing the same;
- Innovative, competing with the best in the world in research and development;
- Inspiring, creating a lifelong love of learning.

### **2. Will you make PSE a priority for your party?**

**A:** Yes. Alberta's PSE system should get the attention and support it needs from the government. It's responsible for producing the graduates and research the province needs to remain prosperous and become a global leader. Our future depends on our PSE system.

---

In the boom years, major capital investment by the Alberta government and a succession of 6% annual increases in provincial operating grants to public post-secondary institutions helped to transform our post-secondary system. Now, however, new capital spending remains on hold, while the continuing freeze on provincial grants is necessitating cuts to programs and staff which threaten to undermine both the capacity of the system and the quality of the student experience.

### **3. Do you support an immediate increase in provincial spending on PSE, at least to cover cost inflation and expanding enrolment?**

**A:** Yes.

### **4. Will you undertake to provide stable, predictable, multi-year funding for PSE institutions?**

**A:** Absolutely. I will put Alberta's PSE system on a 3-year funding cycle with room for modest growth. Institutions will be able to maintain staffing levels and commit to capital investments with confidence, knowing they can count on the necessary funding with no surprises.

---

According to a national Harris/Decima poll conducted earlier this year, a majority of Albertans – like a majority of Canadians – agreed or strongly agreed that ‘Governments should invest more in universities and colleges, even if that means I personally have to pay a little more in taxes’.

**5. As party leader, are you prepared to support increased investment in post-secondary education, even if this means raising taxes?**

A: I support increased investment in post-secondary education, but this does not make tax rises inevitable or necessary. I intend to maintain a low-tax regime, keeping Alberta’s economy growing. A healthy business environment fed by strong, sustainable growth will do more to keep Alberta’s PSE system flush with funds than higher taxes, which risk constricting that growth.

---

Despite some hard-won progress in eliminating barriers to access to PSE, post-secondary participation rates in Alberta remain comparatively low (16.9% in the key 18 to 34 age group). The Aboriginal population, in particular, continues to be underrepresented in our system.

**6. What measures do you propose to take to reduce barriers to access and to increase participation in PSE across the province, while preserving the quality of the system?**

A: Improving access to PSE for groups with a marginal presence in the system is extremely important for both general prosperity and individual betterment. My government will work with post-secondary institutions to create outreach strategies to attract and retain students from specific areas such as rural Alberta, Metis communities and our province’s First Nations. Together, we will fund culturally appropriate support and mentorship programs to ease students’ transition to the post-secondary academic environment. To reduce their financial burdens, my government will offer bursaries and scholarships targeted specifically for students in these groups.

---

The barrier to access to PSE most often cited by the public is cost. One way the provincial government is attempting to limit the burden on students and their families is through a regulation which caps annual tuition fee increases at the annual rate of increase in CPI. In an attempt to raise much-needed revenue, some Alberta post-secondary institutions also impose so-called ‘mandatory non-instructional fees,’ which are not subject to the Tuition Fee Regulation.

**7. Will you maintain the current Tuition Fee Regulation which caps annual tuition fee increases at the annual rate of CPI inflation?**

A: Yes. Tuition should not be an insurmountable barrier to qualified students.

**8. Will you undertake to regulate ‘mandatory non-instructional fees’ at Alberta post-secondary institutions?**

A: I don’t want to dictate terms to post-secondary institutions, but I would like to collaborate with them to rein in such fees and find solutions to keep costs down for students.

---

In recent years, targeted investments have enhanced the research profile of Alberta’s universities. Under the banner of ‘Alberta Innovates,’ the government has taken the lead in attempting to streamline and realign the publicly funded research system to better reflect ‘provincial priorities.’ Changes include the phasing out of the world-renowned Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research (AHFMR) and its replacement by a new Alberta Innovates–Health Solutions (AI-HS) corporation with a narrower research focus.

**9. Do you agree with the direction set by recent initiatives intended to align the publicly funded research system, including the universities, more closely with ‘provincial priorities’?**

A: No. It’s true that the government has shared priorities with research institutions, especially in areas like energy and the environment. However, discovery is not a linear, controllable process. The government doesn’t know as much as researchers and should not attempt to stifle their work by legislating progress, timelines or results. Experts need the freedom to follow their instincts and pursue lines of inquiry as they see fit.

**10. What role do you think the provincial government should play in setting the research agenda in our universities?**

A: The government has a limited role to play. I will create an independent organization endowed with stable, long-term funding and a mandate to foster partnerships aimed at designing and implementing radical new technologies for the energy industry. This organization will operate at a distance from the government and will disburse funds to researchers focused on commercially promising technologies, but it will not attempt to influence the research process.

---

The increasing ‘vocationalization’ of higher education, and the concentration of resources in the STEM disciplines, has led some to question the value of the ‘liberal arts education’

our post-secondary institutions offer. Yet demand for liberal arts programs remains strong, and there is much evidence to show the importance to our society of research in the social sciences and humanities.

**11. What role do you see for post-secondary liberal arts education in building the kind of society, and the kind of future, Albertans want?**

A: The liberal arts remain vital, despite the lack of respect they sometimes receive. I will ensure that Alberta's universities have the funds to maintain diverse programs in the humanities and social sciences to attract the best students and support strong research.

Aside from providing tens of thousands of jobs in Alberta, the liberal arts allow us to define ourselves culturally, historically and imaginatively. They teach us to take an interest in thoughts, experiences and cultures beyond our own, broadening our horizons and our means of self-expression; they teach us to think critically about the world and our place in it. The liberal arts make Alberta tolerant, open-minded and creative, while giving us a strong sense of ourselves as inheritors to the western way of life. I will keep the liberal arts prominent so we can stay this way, even as we do business with an ever-changing world.