

POLITICAL FORUM QUESTIONS

THE ISSUES

Issue 1: Child Poverty

Based on the data gathered in the GoA's fact sheet titled *Together We Raise Tomorrow: Alberta's Poverty Reduction Strategy (2013)*, in 2010, there were 91,000 Albertan children under the age of 18 (11.3 per cent) living below the low-income measure. While 1 in 6 children under the age of 6 (17.2 per cent) live in low-income families, totaling 48,200 young children living in poverty. This high level of child poverty in Alberta requires an alternative response as the incidences of poverty has not declined. Given the long-term impact of child poverty on the well-being and development of Alberta's children, how will you achieve success in the area of reducing child poverty?

Issue 2: Family Financial Hardship

The economic gap between Alberta families continues to widen, resulting in greater financial challenges for low-income families. From *Together We Raise Tomorrow: Alberta's Poverty Reduction Strategy (2013)*, the annual market income of the poorest 10 per cent of Alberta families only increased \$5000 from 1994-2006, in contrast to a \$107,000 increase for the richest 10 per cent of families. In addition to the widening gap, low income families are increasingly vulnerable to accumulating household debt, as Alberta has a higher debt-to-income ratio than the national average (143 per cent compared to 127 per cent nationally). If you are elected how will you ensure that the impact of financial hardships on families will be addressed?

Issue 3: Aboriginal Children in Care

Children of First Nations heritage represent approximately 9 per cent of the child population of Alberta (Edmonton Journal³). Findings from the *Child Intervention Statistics - 2008/09 to 2012/13*⁴ prepared by GoA's

³ Henton, Darcy. "Deaths of Alberta aboriginal children in care no 'fluke of statistics'". *The Edmonton Journal*, January 8, 2014. <http://www.edmontonjournal.com/life/Deaths+Alberta+aboriginal+children+care+fluke+statistics/9212384/story.html> (January 8, 2014)

⁴ Alberta Human Services. *Aboriginal children and in care/not in care statistics (2008-09 -2012-13)*. <http://humanservices.alberta.ca/documents/child-intervention-statistics-2008-2013.pdf>

Human Services, report that 52 per cent of Aboriginal children received child intervention services in 2008-2009, this number increased to 58 per cent in 2012-2013. The increase in child intervention among Aboriginal children suggests the urgency in finding a solution. What will you do as a member of the government in this province to confront this escalating child problem?

Issue 4: The Education of Aboriginal Children

Educational achievement is one of the most critical indicators of the determinants of health. The data provided in the provincial 2008-09 Alberta Education *Annual Report* states that the dropout rate for Aboriginal students is 11.2 per cent - which is more than double the rate for students overall (4.3 per cent.)⁵ What will you do to address this critical issue if you are the successful candidate in the upcoming election?

Issue 5: Aboriginal Challenges

In the report **Urban Aboriginal People in Western Canada** from the Canada West Foundation, the author identifies that Aboriginal people living in urban settings face far greater challenges than non-Aboriginal urban populations. These challenges include lower education levels, lower labour force participation rates, higher unemployment rates, lower income levels and an over-representation in the criminal justice system as both victims and perpetrators. If you are successful in your election bid, how would you propose addressing these concerns for Aboriginal children and families in Alberta?

Issue 6: Aboriginal Housing/Health

Housing is consistently identified as a critical factor related to health status. As noted in the report ***Health Determinants for First Nations in Alberta***, crowded housing is identified as a concern for less than 5 per cent of all Albertan families, compared to almost 18 per cent of First Nations children and 31 per cent of First Nations children who live on-reserve (Lachance et al, 2009). As well the authors report that unsafe housing (as defined by dwellings requiring major structural, plumbing or electrical repairs), is an issue for 30.6 per cent of First Nations in Alberta compared to 6 per cent for all Alberta residents.

⁵ Ensuring First Nations, Metis and Inuit Student Success: Leadership through Governance (2011) http://www.asba.ab.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/Inuit_success_report.pdf, 10.

Given that this area is a Federal responsibility, please outline how you would be a genuine advocate for change to address this disparity in housing status for First Nations compared to non-Aboriginal children if you are successful in your bid for election in the upcoming provincial election.

Issue 7: Staff Retention for Social Services Agencies

The majority of non-profit child and family serving agencies in Alberta are members of ALIGN. The Government of Alberta Human Services contracts with these member agencies to provide services to meet the needs of children and families at risk. In 2012, The ALIGN employee member organizations reported a 24 per cent employee turnover rate. In 2013 that number rose to 53 per cent. Staff retention is primarily a result of wage disparities between ALIGN member agencies and comparable Human Services staff involved in child and youth services, If elected, how will you address this issue?

A provincial election is expected to take place very soon. Let's not miss a vital opportunity to ask candidates for their positions on significant future policy development and direction. Candidates are listening and responsive during their campaign. This brief paper is intended to identify the issues and the ways that you can help.