

Alberta Liberal MLA criticizes state of infrastructure, housing

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News Staff

Calgary MLA Dave Taylor hosted a policy-formulating forum at the University of Alberta last week, addressing how affordable housing and infrastructure issues will affect the future of the province.

Taylor, Deputy Leader of the Alberta Liberals and the official Provincial Housing and Municipal Affairs critic, said he's concerned about the current state of Alberta's infrastructure.

"This is the richest province in one of the richest countries in the world, and yet we have the public sector infrastructure of a have-not province and, in some cases, pretty darn close to a third-world country," Taylor said.

Taylor estimated that the province faces an infrastructure deficit of \$12 billion, which is the total amount needed to improve existing structures and build much-needed new ones.

"That deferred maintenance has to take precedence," he said. "Even though it's not nearly as obvious or as sexy as building a brand-new freeway, there is a human health and safety issue. We don't want our overpasses falling down as we're driving over or under them."

Taylor also advocated for the re-evaluation of the government's priorities to solve Alberta's affordable housing crisis.

"[We need] a declaration that we will solve the affordable housing crisis within a set period of time," he said. "This is not rocket science; this is building homes for people."

Taylor outlined the Liberals' proposed program, which would spend up to \$200 million per year for five years. He believes the problem would be solved because the government wouldn't be the only group building affordable housing.

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DAVE TAYLOR
DEPUTY LEADER
ALBERTA LIBERAL PARTY

He explained that through providing incentives for private developers and by amending legislation that inhibits zoning of affordable housing within other developments, more reasonably priced homes would be created.

The Conservative Party didn't respond to an invitation to discuss this Liberal proposal. However, the Conservative government's Affordable Housing Task Force report echoes Taylor's suggestions, calling for revision of the Municipal Government Act to "support more

flexible zoning, density bonuses, and other incentives."

To fund these and other projects long-term, Taylor proposed the province set aside 30 per cent of its non-renewable resource revenue, which he calls "temporary blessings."

The 30-per-cent portion would then be divided into four different accounts, with 35 per cent of that initial 30 per cent portion being invested in the Alberta Heritage Trust Fund. Taylor said that in 18 years, it would be generating more income from interest than the Province makes from oil and gas today.

"It's sustainable and predictable income because it's conservatively invested," he said.

A further 35 per cent would be a postsecondary education endowment.

"This is designed to create excellence in postsecondary education, in research, and innovation," Taylor said.

Five per cent would be for an arts and culture and social sciences endowment fund, to be topped off between \$500 million and \$1 billion, with the final 25 per cent being spent as a capital account.

"This is how we [would] fund renewal of Alberta's infrastructure," he explained.

Taylor affirmed that the province can't always be dependent on non-renewable resource revenue for its financial prosperity.

"The future of Alberta isn't oil; the future of Alberta is knowledge," he told students. "You need to wrap your head around the notion that you already have a stake in this society."



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University more noteworthy—Amrhein

COLLEGES • CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Internationally, however, Amrhein believes that the name brand of a university may change how a degree is seen.

"Within Alberta, I don't think there is any particular reason why one [degree] should be preferred over another because the Quality Council has weighed in on the issue," Amrhein said.

"However, when you go to China, Japan, Germany, they know who the U of A is because they have experience with us. They probably don't know who Grant MacEwan College is," he said. "So if you present two degrees to someone in Munich, they

know U of A, [and] they probably don't know Grant MacEwan. All else equal, they'll probably pick U of A."

Jinting Zhao, a fourth-year political science student at the U of A, feels that distinction is valid. She thinks that universities can teach a higher caliber of education than colleges are able to.

"It's about access to a network of the best minds and the best resources available in any particular field of study," Zhao said. "These resources are more likely to pool at the University level rather than the college level."

Currently, several thousand potential undergraduate students are turned

away annually by the U of A and U of C. However, Amrhein is also concerned about those high-school graduates who don't move on to any postsecondary education.

He said that when the Faculty of Engineering is known to be admitting people whose averages are in the 80s, "a whole bunch of students with averages in the middle-70s who could succeed never bother to apply."

"There's the students who are turned down, that's several thousand students a year, I guess. [But] I'm as worried, or perhaps more worried, about the discouraged students who never even apply because they think it's hopeless."

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