DECISION 2019:
KEEP ALBERTA COMPETITIVE
WHO ARE WE?

The Edmonton Chamber of Commerce is the respected voice of business in the Edmonton Metropolitan Region. With over 2,000 member companies that employ over 100,000 people in our region, we are one of the largest chambers in Canada and among the most influential business organizations in the country. The Edmonton Chamber is a non-partisan organization and we do not endorse any political party or any candidate seeking elected office.

Knowledge is power! Please keep the priorities in this document top of mind when talking to candidates and as you head to the polls.
COSTS ARE ON THE RISE AND OUR COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE IS DISAPPEARING

The burden of new policy and regulatory changes have all meant higher costs on businesses struggling in a challenging economy. The impact includes both the direct costs of policy changes and the costs incurred by businesses as they work to comply with new regulations. Provincially, these new and increased costs include a $15 per hour minimum wage (a 48% increase over the past three years), higher corporate taxes, new employment standards and labour code changes. The Alberta Carbon Levy has increased the cost of transportation and heating fuels for businesses across the province.

Businesses in Edmonton and throughout Alberta need all orders of government to reverse the trend of ever-increasing costs, making it easier for businesses to grow and succeed.

The Province must enhance the competitiveness of Alberta businesses by addressing the ever-increasing taxes, fees and regulatory costs layered onto business from all orders of government.

This should include:

1.1 Undertaking a full review of the effects of labour legislation changes on both businesses and workers, including the $15 minimum wage, the revised Employment Standards Code and changes to the Labour Relations Code.

1.2 Exploring alternatives to the current “one-size-fits-all” minimum wage, including a possible trainee wage or a minimum compensation model that would account for employee benefits that are currently not captured in the wage rate (i.e. post-secondary education and training, health insurance, matching RRSP programs, etc.)

1.3 Ensuring that any programs designed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions do not undermine the competitiveness of Alberta businesses, and in fact bolster their ability to succeed in the global market.

1.4 Allowing large emitters to comply with the Climate Leadership Plan, in part, by purchasing verified carbon offsets on the global market.
The risks of continuing to run deficits and accumulating debt are a real concern for the business community. High levels of debt will lead to higher taxes down the road, reduced services and limit government’s ability to invest in infrastructure to support economic growth. If current economic and spending trends continue, the Government of Alberta will accrue $95 billion in debt by 2023.

Businesses want to see a return to balanced budgets, and need to understand what actions will be taken to achieve that balance.

The Government of Alberta must chart a path to a balanced budget and clearly outline how it will get there.

This should include:

2.1 Eliminating operational spending growth until the budget is balanced.

2.2 Aligning spending with core government priorities, including a full and transparent review of all government programs and services to eliminate under-used or ineffective services.

2.3 Using carbon levy compliance payments to fund debt reduction, if a carbon levy is maintained.

2.4 Considering all available infrastructure funding options for both construction and maintenance, including public-private partnerships.
EDMONTON CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
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PRIORITY #3
DIVERSIFY OUR TRADING RELATIONSHIPS AND OUR ECONOMY

Edmonton Chamber members are strongly in favour of diversifying our economy, making it more stable and resilient in the face of global forces. Relying too heavily on a single industry or a single international market creates economic volatility and uncertainty for Alberta businesses.

Alberta relies on the United States for 87% of all provincial exports. Virtually all oil exports are shipped to the U.S. This over-reliance has led to an oil price differential that has cost the economy as much as $80 million per day. Now, more than ever, Canada must find new trading partners.

Interprovincial trade can provide new markets for Alberta goods and services but, despite a new Canadian Free Trade Agreement, trade barriers continue to significantly impede the movement of goods between Canadian provinces and territories. Unless they are resolved, internal trade barriers will continue to diminish our competitiveness and counteract the benefits of new international trade agreements such as CETA, CUSMA and CPTPP.

The Government of Alberta must outline a strategy to diversify the economy and to increase trade beyond our provincial, territorial and national borders.

This should include:

3.1 Setting specific, measurable and commercially sustainable five-year diversification targets that include performance objectives and transparent reporting.

3.2 Continuing to advocate for pipelines, allowing Alberta’s energy products to reach markets overseas.

3.3 Promoting the sale of our natural resources across Canada and to markets abroad.

3.4 Expanding programs that help small and mid-sized businesses export to new markets.

3.5 Working with the federal government and other provinces and territories to develop an integrated national transportation utility corridor network, including the development of a northern infrastructure corridor.

3.6 Working with the federal government and all provinces and territories to promote free trade across Canada and eliminate interprovincial trade barriers.