

Prairie Manifesto Project

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AA = Alberta Alliance
CON = Conservative Party
LP = Liberal-Progressive Party
PC = Progressive Conservative Party
SKP = Saskatchewan Party
UFM = United Farmers of Manitoba

CCF = Cooperative Commonwealth Federation
LIB = Liberal Party
NDP = New Democratic Party
SC = Social Credit
UFA = United Farmers of Alberta
WCC = Western Canadian Concept

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A SOLID PROGRAM

FOR

A BETTER ALBERTA

The Platform of the Alberta New Democratic Party

1979 Alberta General Election

February 26, 1979

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A SOLID PROGRAM FOR A BETTER ALBERTA

Good Housing at Fair Prices

After eight years of Lougheed leadership, Alberta has achieved the highest housing costs in Canada. This didn't just happen; it was the result of a phenomenal lack of planning and a great tolerance for the activities of land speculators.

House prices have badly overtaken Albertans' purchasing power. In 1961, more than 70 per cent of Alberta families could afford to buy a home. By 1977 it was only 31 per cent.

At the same time, the profits of land developers have gone through the ceiling. The New Democratic Party is convinced there is a direct relationship between high development profits and high housing costs.

1. Land Speculation Tax

Adopt the Land Use Forum recommendation of a 50 per cent tax on the unearned increment in land transactions. This proposal recognizes there is a difference between inflationary increases in land values and the quantum leap in value which takes place when land use is changed, or expected to be changed, by decision of a public authority. A 50 per cent tax is accordingly levied on the difference between the selling price and the productive value of the land at its present value. The proceeds of this tax will be turned over to the municipality affected.

2. Urban Land Reserves

Full support and assistance to municipalities in the establishment and operation of urban land reserves. As the example of Mill Woods in Edmonton demonstrates, such projects have a role in supplying lots for affordable housing. Properly managed, they are a self-sustaining mechanism for the orderly transformation of raw land to serviced lots for home construction.

3. Lending Programs

Low interest mortgages for Alberta home buyers of limited income. Such loans should be related to realistic house prices in Alberta markets. Repayment schedules should be based on ability to pay.

A second mortgage financing program to assist larger numbers of Albertans to qualify for conventional mortgages from private sector lenders.

Special sweat equity programs, particularly for native people.

Loans to continuing co-operatives to provide greater choice among housing and lifestyle options.

Low interest loans, supplemented by insulation grants, to encourage the remodelling and restoration of houses in older neighborhoods.

A Fair Deal for Tenants

While the majority of landlords and tenants enjoy a cordial relationship, there are some on both sides who fail to meet the obligation of fairness to the other party. The role of the province is to establish the ground rules which prevent unacceptable behavior.

While the New Democratic Party accepts the right of landlords to evict unruly tenants, for example, it also accepts the right of a tenant who meets normal obligations to maintain his or her tenancy in peace. The Landlord and Tenant Act, 1978 fails in some crucial respects to recognize that tenants who meet their obligations have a right to protection from those landlords who would exploit a market position to unreasonable advantage.

Rapidly inflating property values have increased the return expected by many landlords at the same time as alternative accommodation has become scarce. Prior to the introduction of rent controls, and once again now that controls are being lifted, some landlords are seeking increases which cannot be justified according to costs.

The Alberta government as a landlord has joined the ranks of problem landlords by its decision to seek a higher proportion of income from the poorest of its tenants - senior citizens and low income families.

In this atmosphere, the New Democratic Party proposes and commits itself to work for the following reforms:

1. Landlord and Tenant Legislation

A Tenants' Bill of Rights which will free tenants from the fear of arbitrary eviction. Landlords will have full power to evict where a tenant fails to meet his or her obligations or where the property is required for personal or family use. In particular, the following are grounds for eviction:

- a) failure to pay rent
- b) landlord requires premises for his own use
- c) causing a disturbance to other tenants
- d) damage
- e) disobeying a court order respecting the tenancy
- f) demolition
- g) failure to make a damage deposit
- h) altering the number of tenants without consent
- i) causing a safety risk
- j) caretaker's suite
- k) accommodation provided with employment
- l) illegal use of premises
- m) unauthorized sub-letting

A legislated obligation on the part of landlords to maintain their premises in a reasonable state of repair, having regard for the general character of the community. Present landlord-tenant legislation correctly notes the tenant is obliged to maintain rental premises in a tidy state and provides harsh penalties for those who do not. But landlords are not obliged in the same manner to maintain their premises to acceptable standards. Most landlords already accept the existence of such an obligation. It is only the slumlords, many of whom receive their rent cheques from the welfare program, who are likely to be affected in a drastic manner by such legislation.

An overhaul of the legislation dealing with mobile home parks. Astronomic house prices in major cities are making mobile homes more popular. There must be an end to the "kick-back" arrangements which exclude tenants who do not buy from preferred dealers. Similarly, there must be a reasonable limit to the power of park owners to make rules governing the lives of people who live in mobile homes.

2. Fair Rents

The Alberta New Democratic Party continues to believe the Lougheed government acted precipitously in phasing out rent controls. There continues to be a shortage of moderately-priced rental accommodation as measured by the CMHC Survey.

Rent controls, which allow landlords to recover increases in their costs, should be continued at least until there are alternatives for tenants faced with large rent hikes. The availability of alternatives is a function of vacancy rate.

Public housing and senior citizens' accommodation, run by the province, charge rent as a percentage of income. Rents should be reduced from the 30 percent now charged to 25 percent of tenants' incomes.

Cutting Municipal Apron Strings

In a now infamous remark, government minister Hugh Horner once referred to Alberta's municipalities as the "children of the province".

A more cogent, if unwitting, statement of the problem would be difficult to find.

In its almost obsessive drive to remake all of Alberta in a conservative big business image, the government has concentrated more and more power into its own hands, while simultaneously maintaining jealous absolute control over every avenue of revenue open to it. And the predictable result for our municipalities has been an increasingly serious financial situation.

At the same time as costs have been rising dramatically due to expanding populations and forced growth fueled inflation, the government's ill-advised restraint program has forced a decline in municipally sponsored services and programs. And what provincial funding remains is tied up in a restrictive program of tied grants which are usually incapable of allowing adequately for the specific problems and circumstances encountered by individual jurisdictions.

So, municipalities have no other choice - they are forced to raised the tax burden on their one major revenue base, property taxes.

Thus, provincial restraint finally translates into large increases in the most regressive of all taxes.

The solution to this tragic fiscal merry-go-round is so obvious that just about every group and institution in Alberta even remotely interested in municipal finance has been clamouring - in the face of massive government indifference - for it for years. Provincial-municipal revenue sharing.

It should be noted that the government's "billion dollar bonanza" seems not to have fooled too many Albertans. People realize that the circumstances which have led to the present sorry state of municipal finance in Alberta will not go away simply because the government has played Santa Claus on the eve of an election. The root causes remain, and municipalities are still left with no alternative to the steady accumulation of debt loads that will bring us right back to the same position in a very few years.

Alberta New Democrats propose the implementation of a revenue sharing program involving two major elements:

- a) deconditionalizing provincial assistance, excepting only areas for new program development such as ambulance service
- b) a formula which will tie municipal grants to all provincial revenues, excluding the Heritage Savings Trust Fund. The formula would be negotiated with the municipalities, and would be based on such factors as isolation, growth, population and service area.

It would be premature at this time to attach fixed percentages or dollar figures to this program, as these would be questions which rightly should be a matter of negotiation between the provincial government and the municipalities affected.

But regardless of the details embodied in the final draft of the program, it can be stated safely that such a revenue sharing program would have two positive results. It would free the municipalities' revenues for allocation as the competent local authorities saw fit; and it would guarantee those municipalities a substantially larger revenue base on which to administer their respective jurisdictions, thus obviating the need for further property tax increases and, in fact, making reductions in such taxes not only possible, but quite probable.

Counting People In

Nowhere is the careless attitude of the government towards the vast majority of Albertans more evident than in the field of social services - people programs.

A sudden last minute spending spree cannot make good the harm caused by years of pointless cutbacks, restraint, and neglect. And, after the election is over, there is every indication Albertans will see a return to the tightfisted pennypinching that has characterized the Tory approach to social spending, completing the cynical election cycle.

Alberta New Democrats are fully aware that social problems are not solved simply by throwing money at them. But by the same token, an adequate level of social spending is essential if all Albertans are to have a fair chance at attaining a standard and style of living sufficient to free them from the numbing effects of poverty, ignorance and illness.

It is in this spirit that the Alberta NDP will pursue a series of innovative and generally inexpensive programs designed to ensure that no Albertan capable of and willing to assume a productive and fruitful role in the life of our province is denied the opportunity to do so.

1. Education

Provincial education policy must be based on the obvious need of local boards and authorities to be able to plan over the long term to meet evolving needs and circumstances specific to their own jurisdictions. The current system of "tied" grants, and the sudden flash of money attending the calling of this election, make a mockery of such planning. The Alberta New Democratic Party proposes to drastically reduce the number of "tied" grants, while at the same time increasing the provincial government's share of school district revenues from the current approximate 76 to 90 percent.

Alberta New Democrats acknowledge the responsibility of the provincial government to ensure adequate basic standards in personnel, programs and facilities - it is the responsibility and the right of local authorities to make program adjustments to meet local needs. Within this guideline, there are three specific priority programs for which the Alberta NDP will work in the next four years:

- a) a major thrust in the area of providing handicapped children with an adequate education, with the goal of integrating handicapped children as far as possible into the regular school system
- b) guaranteeing the opportunity of rural children to receive an education of a quality equal in every respect to that of their urban counterparts, including specific initiatives to ensure the availability of all major programs in rural areas. Steps will be taken to ease transportation difficulties and to arrest the tendency toward closure of local schools.
- c) a complete overhaul of the school grant structure permitting maximum local decision-making and including realistic equalization grants for low assessment areas. The provincial share of school revenues must be substantially increased to achieve the essential twin goals of reducing classroom size to a target of 20 students per classroom, and eliminating split classes.

2. Health Care

In a province as far-flung as is Alberta, the maintenance of a top notch ambulance service is essential to the well-being of our people. To meet this need it is the policy of the Alberta NDP to establish a provincially co-ordinated ambulance service incorporating an integrated communications network and serviced with personnel and facilities of high calibre. Recognizing that ambulance service is an essential health service, the Alberta NDP will work for the provision of such services under the Alberta Health Care Insurance Plan.

There can no longer be any reasonable excuse for the continued failure to introduce a comprehensive province-wide denticare program for children under the age of twelve. Such a program will remain a top priority for Alberta New Democrats.

The whole of Alberta's health care delivery system, especially the methods and levels of funding employed, must be the subject of a complete and thorough review. In a situation where few are satisfied with the health care delivery system, the system will suffer. Specifically, the Alberta NDP can see no justification for the continuance of Alberta Health Care premiums, nor for the continuation of the practice of balance billing. The question of doctors' income levels is one that must be dealt with fairly.

Prescription drugs are a necessary part of the total health package. A pharmacare program is essential to guarantee all Albertans equal access to the pharmaceutical products they require.

That Albertans should be faced with waiting lists for surgery; that our hospitals - during a period of massive population increase - should have to consider cutting back in the number of beds available; that the delivery of emergency and institutional health care should be disrupted by no-win labour disputes occasioned by highly centralized restraint policies - all this constitutes a sad commentary on the government's consistent mismanagement and underfunding of Alberta's hospitals. The cutbacks policy must be ended for hospitals. Alberta New Democrats will work for significant hospital upgrading in the two crucial areas of increased funding to upgrade facilities, and the provision of a greater range of facilities.

3. Social Services

A combination of financial need and a desire for personal growth have led more Alberta women than ever before to seek employment. Provision of adequate child care services is essential if these women are to be allowed a fair chance at pursuing their chosen livelihoods. The response of the government has been inadequate standards for day care centres in the province, and to cut back the funding for public

centres. It is the policy of the Alberta New Democratic Party to seek the implementation of a program based on the principle of access to quality child care for all who need it. Special emphasis will be placed on adequate space, safety measures, nutrition, staff training, and child/staff ratios.

One of the greatest financial burdens facing our province's health care system arises from the use of acute care facilities in situations where less expensive alternatives would not only prove adequate, but would be better for the person's emotional and psychological health. Thus the existing Home Care program should be expanded to include medical and support services with funding adequate to ensure everyone who needed them could obtain these services. The prevention of unnecessary institutionalization of permanently disabled young people and senior citizens would also be a major goal of an expanded Home Care program.

Despite the government's new-found sympathy, services for handicapped people in Alberta remain inadequate. A whole range of proposals are required to bring Alberta's handicapped to the centre of Alberta society.

- a) an indexed guaranteed income program for the physically disabled, the mentally ill and the mentally retarded
- b) the provision of expanded health benefits to cover all health-related costs through the Alberta Health Care Insurance Program
- c) expanded assessment and rehabilitation services
- d) a program to encourage the hiring of the handicapped, both in the public and private sectors
- e) sheltered employment developed for those unable to participate in the regular workforce
- f) recognition of the right of the handicapped to enter the regular school system wherever possible
- g) increased access to public transportation and public buildings, including a special transportation allowance in rural areas

- h) provision of significant housing options for the disabled, including expansion of the home adaptation program and the creation of a housing registry for the disabled
- i) the amending of the Individual Rights Protection Act to prohibit discrimination against the handicapped

Alberta New Democrats look forward to the day when the provision of adequate pensions to our senior citizens is finally removed from the list of election issues by virtue of its being an accomplished fact. The long-term goal of the Alberta NDP remains the replacement of the present patchwork quilt of inadequate private and public schemes with a public, rational and universal plan. Such plan would be jointly agreed upon by the provincial and federal levels of government and would provide a liveable, wage-related, CPI-indexed pension at sixty years. In the interim, however, more immediate improvements must remain the goal for the next four years. The Alberta Assured Income Plan must be increased by at least as much as living standards have increased since the plan was developed in 1975. Further, payments under the plan must be fully indexed to the CPI from now on. Finally, the AAIP must be increased to even begin to bring the majority of Alberta's senior citizens above the poverty line. To meet these ends, Alberta New Democrats propose a doubling of Alberta's contributions under the AAIP.

Labour Relations - A Fair Deal for Working Men and Women

Alberta's 1978 strike record, the worst in recent history, is the result of a climate of ill-will at the bargaining table caused directly by the confrontationalist attitude of the Lougheed administration. In legislation as well as wage policy the present administration has shown it cares little for the economic well being of wage earners.

The New Democratic Party in Alberta will work over the next term to improve matters on three fronts:

1. Labour Legislation

Repeal Bill 41, The Public Service Employee Relations Act. No one should be surprised that a sub-committee of the International Labour Organization has condemned the government's public sector bargaining legislation. The legislation lacks the basic fairness and freedoms necessary to build good labour relations. Government employees are not second-class citizens. They deserve the same bargaining rights as anyone else under The Alberta Labour Act.

The Alberta Labour Act must be re-written to conform to accepted norms of free collective bargaining. For example, Alberta's section 163, which allows the Cabinet to end strikes at will and order compulsory binding arbitration, must be replaced by a more democratic procedure. If strikes must be halted in the public interest, it should be done in the open on the floor of the Legislative Assembly. Other required reforms include streamlining the procedure for certification, strengthening the unfair labour practise prohibitions, increasing worker representation on the Board of Industrial Relations, improving mediation services and upgrading labour standards.

2. Wage Guidelines

The Lougheed administration has done all wage earners a disservice by repeated, unsubstantiated allegations that wage settlements have caused Canada's high rate of inflation. They have enforced a wage restraint policy, through the restrictive public sector bargaining legislation, which has caused a drop in the standard of living of many Albertans.

These "guidelines" often become the ceiling for bargaining outside the provincial government - in municipalities, local authorities and the private sector. The Alberta NDP will advocate an end to wage guidelines, and their implicit attack on Albertans' living standards, and a return to the give and take of free collective bargaining.

3. Occupational Health and Safety

The provincial government's election period advertising campaign is no substitute for an effective occupational health and safety program. The New Democratic Party caucus will propose the following specific measures to improve Albertans' chance of surviving work without serious accident or injury:

- establish joint labour-management occupational health and safety committees at every worksite with 10 or more employees
- strengthening the right of workers to refuse to do unsafe work
- providing the cost shall be born by employer assessments
- ensuring that workers do not lose wages because of the failure of an employer to meet his obligations under the law
- modernizing and strengthening standards respecting chemical hazards

A Small Business Policy for Alberta

Alberta's owner-operated businesses are the forgotten backbone of our economy and our communities. Between 1971-1977, very small firms (fewer than 20 employees) created 57 percent of the new jobs in Alberta.

Yet small business people find it tough because they haven't been getting the tax breaks and the direct and indirect support from the provincial government.

The Alberta New Democratic Party has studied the problems and presents the following program:

1. A Small Business Act

Legislative proposals have been prepared to provide the framework for a co-ordinated provincial effort to develop the small business sector. Highlights include:

- A small business is defined as a business that is independently owned and operated and is not dominant in its field of operation.
- A target of 40 percent of government purchases to small business within three years.
- Establishment of a small business sub-contracting program to break up government contracts into manageable units for small businesses to bid on, and to encourage the use of sub-contractors on large projects.
- Provision of management advice and administrative aids to small businesses.
- Establishment of a select standing committee of the Assembly to solicit the views of small business people and make ongoing recommendations.

2. Financing

The capital needs of small businesses are great, but the banks and trust companies are more interested in the greater security pledged by large corporations. Some groups in society are disadvantaged respecting their ability to get started in business.

New Democrats propose:

- Establishing a \$50 million equity fund called Ventures Alberta to establish seed money for native business endeavors. The seed funds can act as equity or leverage financing with other lending agencies.
- An expansion of the lending capital of the Alberta Opportunity Company from \$150 million to \$500 million. The new funds will allow for an expansion and modernization of Alberta's small business sector. Producer and consumer co-ops will be eligible.

3. Taxation

The taxation policy of the New Democratic Party is to give tax breaks where they are most needed. It happens that the same policy also does the most good for the economy.

For example, the \$167 million tax reduction scheme is designed to increase the disposable income of farmers and wage earners who are most likely to spend the additional funds in the province at small business establishments.

In addition, however, measures are required to provide specific tax incentive to the small business operator. We propose:

- A reduction in the income tax rate for small businesses from 11 to 6 percent. Six other Canadian provinces have a reduced small business rate.
- A complete review of the corporation tax system to eliminate the imbalance of tax benefit to large, capital-intensive industries. Better support is required for lower capital, labour-intensive industries.

Preserving the Family Farm

Alberta New Democrats believe the family farm is the backbone of agriculture in Alberta, and must remain so. However, certain steps must be taken to secure the family farm. The neglect of the agricultural sector must end, and agriculture must no longer be left playing second-fiddle to the petroleum industry. Agriculture must regain its place as the leading industry in Alberta.

Concrete steps must be taken to deal with the cost-price squeeze which has perennially placed farmers in difficult circumstances and which makes it difficult for young farmers to get started and stay in business.

Action is required on two fronts: first to deal with the ever increasing costs of production, and second, to stabilize the up and down farm income picture. Such action is particularly urgent in view of the 23 percent drop in farm income in Alberta since 1975.

1. Energy Costs

The rapidly rising cost of energy which resulted from agreements between the Alberta and federal governments to push up the price of oil has had a particularly negative impact on the Alberta farmer, because of the important role energy plays in farm operations. The farmer uses energy not only to heat and light his home, but also to run his trucks and machinery, and to heat and light farm buildings. Rising energy costs have put a serious strain on many farm operations.

Farm fuel costs can be reduced by taking a portion of an oil royalty in kind, processing it and selling it at a reduced rate to farmers. Alberta New Democrats specifically call for a three-year fixed price for farm fuel, with farm gasoline set at 47¢ a gallon and diesel at 44¢ a gallon.

The price of natural gas supplied to rural gas co-ops should be stabilized by freezing the wholesale price for three years, and

power costs should be reduced substantially through a public power system which would equalize power rates across the province.

2. Other Input Costs

Energy is not the only commodity which has skyrocketed in price. The cost of such things as farm machinery, land, fertilizer, and the cost of borrowing money, all contribute to the serious agricultural cost-price squeeze.

Today's high interest rates make the cost of borrowing money prohibitive for many farmers and have set a number on the road to bankruptcy. The Alberta NDP would commit loan funds of \$500 million to the Agricultural Development Corporation and make the ADC a first-call lender. Funds for the establishment, expansion and diversification of farming operations would be loaned at 6 percent for the first five years and 8 3/4 percent for the balance of a 25-year term.

Also, Alberta's farmers deserve a full-scale inquiry into farm machinery and parts pricing and a complete overhaul of the Farm Implement Act.

To keep the price of land within reason to allow young farmers to get started or to enable existing farmers to develop an economic unit, the NDP, in addition to making substantial low interest money available, would establish a land bank similar to the very successful Saskatchewan land bank. Farmers will be able to transfer the family farm to a son or daughter without placing either the parent or the child in an awkward financial situation.

3. A Decent Income for Farmers

In order to ensure that farmers receive a decent income for their produce, it is necessary to ensure that such prices are stabilized. However, it is not good enough to stabilize prices at current levels; they must be stabilized at levels which will ensure the farmer an adequate net return - after his many expenses have been met. That requires a commitment to orderly marketing of farm products - a commitment Alberta New Democrats are prepared to make.

Specifically, the Alberta NDP advocates continued support for the new advanced bidding system developed by the Alberta Hog Marketing Board, so that the serious ups and downs in hog prices can largely be smoothed out and maintained at profitable levels.

In view of the fact that farmers are receiving less in real dollars today than they did in the 1930's for feed grains, the New Democratic Party believes there must be a return to orderly marketing of feed grains, to ensure an equitable flow of feed grains at fair prices.

Finally, greater stability in farm income can be achieved with a new international marketing strategy for Alberta concentrating on support for multilateral commodity agreements, improvements to Canada's export system and support for renewed selling efforts by the Canadian Wheat Board.

Land Use Planning

Alberta's bountiful and beautiful land resources are our greatest strength. Yet land is a finite resource. Land cannot be created, but its value can be destroyed.

Alberta's farmlands are threatened by the forces of industrial and urban growth.

Alberta's wilderness lands are threatened by the forces of development and greed.

With only marginal exceptions, the Lougheed administration has been willing to co-operate with those who would make short-term gain at the expense of the province's future.

In the final analysis, land is a priceless natural resource which cannot be treated as a simple economic commodity. New Democrats are committed to the gradual development of a province-wide land use policy for the protection of the needs of future generations.

1. A Land Protection Act

Establish a provincial Land Commission for the following purposes:

- a) to preserve agricultural land for farm use
- b) to encourage the establishment and maintenance of family farms, and land in an agricultural land reserve, for a use compatible with the preservation of family farms and farm use of the land;
- c) to preserve green belt land in and around urban areas;
- d) to encourage the establishment and maintenance of land in a green belt land reserve for a use compatible with the preservation of a green belt;
- e) to preserve land bank land having desirable qualities for urban or industrial development and restrict subdivision or use of the land for other purposes;

- f) to encourage the establishment and maintenance of land in a land bank reserve for a use compatible with an ultimate use for industrial and urban development;
- g) to preserve park land for recreational use;
- h) to encourage the establishment and maintenance of land in a park land reserve for a use compatible with an ultimate use for recreation; and
- i) to advise and assist municipalities and improvement districts in the preparation and production of the land reserve plans required for the purpose of this Act.

Empower the Commission to establish agricultural reserves to protect farmland from harmful uses.

Establish fair, democratic procedures to hear appeals and ensure compensation for persons who suffer direct costs as a result of land use planning decisions.

2. Urban Development

Permissive legislation for the creation and operation of municipally-controlled urban land reserves.

Effective democratic procedures which ensure full consultation with persons affected by land use decisions.

Clear conflict of interest guidelines for all persons involved in the planning process.

No new annexation without the concurrence of the municipality affected.

Ensure that prior assurance of the provision of services and community facilities is obtained before new subdivisions are approved.

Steer urban development away from prime agricultural land wherever possible.

Use of common corridors for highways, pipelines, railways and utility lines.

3. Recreation

Environmental laws should be tightened to eliminate certificates of variance and to enforce strict anti-pollution standards.

Amend the wilderness statutes to require full legislative debate before any lands can be removed from a wilderness area. The New Democratic Party is committed to preserving and expanding existing wildernesses.

Expansion of the provincial park system, including the establishment of further urban parks. The Alberta NDP wants greater variety in park settings.

Expansion of provincial campsites, including a return to the policy of providing free Transportation Department roadside campsites.

A comprehensive zoning system for the Eastern Slopes which is approved by the Assembly and requires an Assembly resolution to be changed.

The development of a restrictive master plan for the province.

4. Resource Development

No strip-mining of agricultural lands until the reclamation technology has been proven under Alberta conditions, relevant to the area in question.

A complete review of forestry leases to determine optimum development patterns for this industry.

Farmland should not be flooded for industrial or resource development purposes, particularly where alternatives are available.

Equalized Energy Prices at Lower Rates

For a province as rich in energy resources as Alberta is, Albertans everywhere are paying far too much for the energy they consume. Worse, there are vast disparities in the cost of energy from one region of Alberta to the next. As a rule, rural Albertans pay substantially more than necessary and residents of northern Alberta pay more than their rural counterparts in other regions of the province.

The New Democratic Party believes that energy costs to Albertans should be kept down and should be equalized throughout the province. Several provinces have already demonstrated it can be done by equalizing rates for electric power. Moreover, if it is possible to equalize liquor prices throughout Alberta, it should be possible to equalize the price of a commodity as essential as energy - especially since we produce so much of the energy right here in Alberta.

1. Lower and Equal Power Rates

The New Democratic Party believes that the electric power system in Alberta should be publicly-owned. It is proposed that funds from the Heritage Trust Fund be used to purchase the two private power companies to establish the public utility. In view of the fact that the private power companies are guaranteed a 15 percent rate of return on investment, it will be possible to effect a reduction in power rates for all categories of users through a more equitable capital structure.

Alberta remains the only province in Canada west of New Brunswick which does not own its own power system. It is long overdue for Alberta to get in step with the rest of the country.

Clearly Alberta would benefit substantially from public power. Even though Alberta is an energy-rich province, the people of this province pay substantially more for power than the people of Saskatchewan, who enjoy the benefits of public power. For example, customers of rural power in Alberta pay 53 percent more for power than rural customers in Saskatchewan. In addition rural installation costs are

significantly less in Saskatchewan than Alberta. Public power would not only allow power to be distributed more cheaply to everyone, it would allow rates to be equalized throughout the province.

2. Natural Gas

Alberta is blessed with an abundance of natural gas. We believe a firm position must be taken to ensure that adequate supplies are retained in this province to meet Alberta needs and to supply Canadian markets. That means there should be no further commitments to export natural gas to the United States, and that sensible conservation measures should be encouraged.

The New Democratic Party also questions why the price of natural gas continues to rise for Alberta customers while the government moves toward greater exports to the United States. Some Albertans may be very proud of the fact that the price of natural gas has been pushed up rapidly for non-Albertans, but it is well to remember that has resulted in significant increases for Alberta customers as well.

While all Albertans are facing higher natural gas prices, the rural Alberta consumer has been particularly hard-hit by the increases. Customers of rural gas co-ops who were promised inexpensive gas by the provincial government and assured that the price would rise no more than 4 percent per year now find that in many cases the cost is three or four times higher than that promised. The result is that many gas co-ops are finding it hard to sign up new members, resulting in higher capital costs per customer.

A good idea has been turned sour through provincial mismanagement. The Alberta NDP is proposing that this matter be dealt with simply by making a commitment to stabilize the price of natural gas to rural gas co-ops by freezing the wholesale price for a period of three years.

3. Gasoline and Farm Fuel

Gasoline and farm fuel prices in Alberta have risen considerably as a result of the deliberate decision to push up Alberta energy prices to near world level.

The Alberta NDP is also concerned about the wide disparity in gasoline prices from one part of the province to another.

It is therefore proposed that the Public Utilities Board be empowered to regulate the wholesale price of gasoline with one wholesale price set for all Alberta. With an equalized wholesale price, the current price disparities between rural and urban Alberta will be virtually eliminated.

The Alberta NDP also proposes that the 120 million gallons of diesel fuel and gasoline used by farmers annually be reduced in price. The price of farm gasoline should be set at 47¢ per gallon and diesel fuel at 44¢ a gallon, and held at that level for a three-year period.

The Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

The Alberta New Democratic Party continues to regard the Heritage Fund as a crucial development tool to secure the province's future.

The performance of the Alberta Cabinet Investment Committee falls short of deploying the Fund to its full potential for ensuring the prosperity of Alberta citizens beyond the oil and gas era. Present deployment of the Fund lacks imagination. The accumulation of cash, bonds and short-term financial paper continues to tie up the bulk of the Fund's assets. Such investments do nothing to diversify the Alberta economy and fail to earn even the rate of inflation.

Clearly, another approach is required. In broad outline, the Alberta NDP proposes the following investment strategy to ensure the Fund is brought into the open and used as the mechanism to co-ordinate Alberta's successful and prosperous entry into the 21st century.

1. Legislative Control

All investment decisions concerning the use of the Heritage Trust Fund should require prior approval by the Legislative Assembly. The government would submit estimates, in the same manner as it does for other financial resources, for full scrutiny by MLAs and the public.

2. The Private Sector

Expansion of the loan capital of the Agricultural Development Corporation from \$200 million to \$500 million.

Establishment of an Alberta Farmstart program for the creation, development and diversification of farming units. The loans would carry an interest rate of 6 percent for the first 5 years and 8 3/4 percent for the balance of a maximum 25-year term.

Expansion of the loan capital of the Alberta Opportunity Company from \$150 million to \$500 million.

3. An Economic Development Strategy

Establishment of an Economic Council of Alberta, representing all major economic interests in the province, to advise the government on the pace, direction and timing of investment decisions.

An early inventory of products which can be produced in Alberta.

Detailed sector policies, with priority action in the following areas:

- a) agricultural processing
- b) forestry
- c) resource upgrading
- d) specialized manufacturing
- e) service sector
- f) trading
- g) petrochemicals
- h) tourism
- i) alternative energy
- j) coal
- k) foreign ownership

Creation of an Alberta Development Corporation with an initial capital authorization of \$1 billion to intervene in cases of foreign takeover and assist in the repatriation of domestic control of the Alberta economy.

Provincial funding for the extension of the Crowsnest Rate to cover products produced for crow grains.

A major five-year research and development program to give Alberta industries a crucial competitive advantage and to relate production methods to Alberta conditions and markets. Priority areas for research and development are industrial design, alternate energy, transportation and agriculture.

Taking over equity ownership of private utilities in Alberta and establishing a province-wide electric utility network.

4. Transportation

Recognition that good transportation is the key to a prosperous future.

A major five-year program for upgrading, reconstructing and expanding Alberta's primary and secondary highway system.

Selective investment in railway rolling stock and new spur lines on negotiated terms favourable to Alberta producers.

Seventy-five percent provincial funding for LRT systems in Edmonton and Calgary.

Feasibility studies on re-opening rail passenger service to population centres in Alberta.

A co-operative venture of upgrading rural bus service with the private sector.

5. A Human Resources Division

Direct and second mortgage lending programs to assist in fulfilling Albertans' housing needs.

A portion of the interest from the Fund allocated to experimental innovative social programs, searching for new, less costly ways to fully utilize the great potential of our human resources.