



NEWS RELEASE: Albertans do not want political parties in local elections

February 22, 2024

EDMONTON – The following official statement was issued on behalf of the Alberta Municipalities (ABmunis) Board of Directors:

Albertans have heard rumblings for the last six months that the provincial government is considering introducing political parties to local municipal government and school board elections through changes to the *Local Authorities Election Act* (LAEA) and the *Municipal Government Act* (MGA).

These rumblings became louder and more frequent in November 2023, when the Government of Alberta conducted two surveys into proposed changes to these acts. While the full survey results have yet to be shared with Albertans, we recently learned that more than 70 per cent of respondents to an online government survey opposed adding party labels alongside the names of candidates on municipal election ballots.

This may come as a surprise to some Albertans, but it is consistent with what Albertans and our members have been saying for months. A survey conducted by pollster Janet Brown for Alberta Municipalities in early September 2023 found that 68 per cent of Albertans are opposed to the introduction of partisan politics at the local level. A resolution expressing opposition to the idea received 95 per cent of the vote at Alberta Municipalities' annual Convention later that month.

There is clearly little support for the provincial government's plan to introduce divisiveness to local governments.

No one has clearly explained what real or perceived problems the introduction of political parties to municipal elections would fix. While political parties serve a purpose at the national and provincial levels due to differences in scale, they are unnecessary at the community level.

The current municipal government model ensures that local elected officials, selected by most voting residents, stand for the best interests of their residents and businesses. Today's model enables mayors and councillors to debate and vote on issues from independent points of view, be open-minded, and freely collaborate with all council colleagues to find solutions to their community's complex problems. These norms would be lost in a party system, as shown by the politics practised at the provincial and federal levels.

Some proponents of the idea have suggested that the introduction of political parties will improve voter turnout in local elections. These claims seem unwarranted, based on preliminary research conducted into recent elections held in Vancouver and Montreal – cities where party politics now occur. These cities have similar voter turnouts to those seen in municipalities across Alberta, so there is little evidence that the provincial government's plan will help. There are other and better ways to increase voter turnout.

Alberta Municipalities is also concerned that the introduction of political parties in municipal elections could result in situations where councillors must balance the interests of the political parties they represent with those of their constituents. In some cases, local elected officials might be asked (or directed) to vote as a bloc – along party lines – regardless of what is in the best interests of their community, and without being allowed to consider the needs of their residents.

Local mayors and councillors are the elected officials closest to the voters. They live and work shoulder to shoulder with their constituents, and they are committed to building their communities to make them better places for everyone. Local governments should be safe spaces for conversation and dialogue among neighbours without the divisiveness and vitriol we are seeing at the provincial and federal levels.

Alberta Municipalities' members are deeply troubled by the idea that local elected officials might put the interests of their political parties ahead of those of the group that matters most, their constituents.

Our association's message to the Government of Alberta and special interest groups that are eager to see partisan politics introduced at the local level is clear, unwavering, and unequivocal – listen to regular Albertans who have repeatedly said they simply aren't interested.

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From the smallest village to the largest city, across every region of the province, Alberta Municipalities (ABmunis) represents the communities where over 85% of Albertans live. ABmunis was founded in 1905 to provide urban and rural-region communities with a united voice. Alberta Municipalities now serves more than 260 of Alberta's 334 municipalities making it the province's largest municipal group.

We work with elected and administrative leaders of Alberta's summer villages, villages, town, cities, and specialized municipalities to advocate for solutions to their common issues, which we categorize as economic, environment, governance, infrastructure, or social.

And we help them build resilient and thriving communities by providing valuable services. We use our members' combined purchasing power to negotiate the best possible value and competitive pricing on employee benefits, insurance, energy, and other services needed to run an effective and efficient municipality.

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